

I M M E R S E

The Reading Bible®



*LUKE
& ACTS*

*Almighty God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
grant, we pray,
that we might be grounded and settled
in your truth
by the coming of your Holy Spirit
into our hearts.*

*What we do not know,
reveal to us;
what is lacking within us,
make complete;
that which we do know,
confirm in us;
and keep us blameless in your service,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

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LUKE & ACTS



Tyndale House Publishers
Carol Stream, Illinois

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—— Welcome to ——

I M M E R S E

The Bible Reading Experience

The Bible is a great gift. The Creator of all things entered into our human story and spoke to us. He inspired people over many centuries to shape words into books that reveal his mind, bringing wisdom into our lives and light to our paths. But God's biggest intention for the Bible is to invite us into its Story. What God wants for us, more than anything else, is that we make the Bible's great drama of restoration and new life the story of our lives, too.

The appropriate way to receive a gift like this is to come to know the Bible deeply, to lose ourselves in it precisely so that we can find ourselves in it. In other words, we need to immerse ourselves in it—to read God's words at length and without distraction, to read with deeper historical and literary perspective, and to read through the Bible with friends in a regular three-year rhythm. *Immerse: The Bible Reading Experience* has been specially designed for this purpose.

Immerse: The Reading Bible presents each book of the Bible without the distractions of chapter and verse markers, subject headers, or footnotes—all later historical additions to the text. The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, is presented in a single-column format with easy-to-read type. To provide meaningful perspective, book introductions give historical and literary context, and the books are often reordered chronologically or grouped with books that share similar ancient audiences. Every feature in this unique Bible enhances the opportunity for readers to engage with God's words in simple clarity.

A more complete explanation of this unique Bible presentation can be found in the articles that begin on page 111 at the back of this volume.

A SACRED SAGA

The Bible's Drama in Six Acts

The goal of Bible reading is to understand the sacred writings in depth so we can learn to live them well. There are several steps on this journey to life-changing wisdom. One is to recognize that the Bible is a collection of many different kinds of writings—stories, songs, letters, prophecies, works of wisdom, apocalyptic visions, and more. And since these writings are complete literary works, they are best read as whole books, each with its own distinctive message, spiritual truths, and literary character. It is also important to remember that these books were written to people who lived in particular historical situations in the ancient world. So to understand them well, we need to strive to understand each book in its original historical and cultural setting.

Overall, the Bible has two overarching goals: to tell the Story of God's plan for his world and then to invite us into that Story. More than anything else, the Bible is a saga—the long, dramatic history of how God has been working with humanity to achieve the thriving life he's always wanted for his world. So a major factor in reading the Bible well is reading it as God's big Story. All the books in the Bible come together to narrate this Story—past, present, and future. In concert, they take us through numerous ups and downs—big moves forward for God's purposes, then devastating setbacks and losses. But God's saving goal remains the same throughout—the redemption and flourishing of his entire creation.

Reading the Bible as this Story requires that we recognize that it is progressive in its revelation. As the Story advances, its light grows. Greater redemption and deeper fulfillment are revealed act by act. The full revelation of God's purposes for humanity cannot be lifted from any single page in the Bible. The essence of stories is that they *move on*.

To be specific, the Bible's big Story is moving toward Jesus. It is in the appearance and work of the Messiah that we find the clearest and most definitive revelation of who God is and what he's doing in the world. As the powerful opening to the book of Hebrews says: "Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. . . . The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God."

God is summoning us all to embrace his sacred words, learn his Story, and then enter into it. The Bible's saga unfolds as a six-act drama, and its major movements are outlined below.

— Act One: —

WORLD'S GENESIS

The Bible's drama opens with God creating the heavens and the earth, but at first they are unformed and unfilled. The first creation story reveals a God who pushes back the power of anarchy and disorder with his Word. God speaks and brings order by forming the world into a well-arranged structure. Then he fills the spaces he creates with all the beauty and wonder of the universe. At each step, God is said to observe that his world is "good." Then at the end, he observes that it is all "very good."

God creates one set of creatures in his own image—humans. This means that we were made to represent God's good, life-giving rule to the rest of the world. God built collaboration with us into the Story from the very beginning. He is the Creator, the most powerful actor in the Bible's drama, but he has decided to do things together with humans as the Story moves forward. We are made to reign—over the world but under God. The human race will determine the shape and direction of things more than any of God's other creatures. What happens to the creation depends on the role we play in the saga.

Then we learn another crucial element in the drama: "On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work." In the writings of the ancient world, when deities were said to *rest*, it meant that they had taken up residence in their temple (see Psalm 132). This key moment at the world's beginning reveals to us that God considered his world to be his home, the place where he would live.

The entire biblical Story will happen in the place God has chosen for his temple, working with his image bearers to achieve his purposes. Heaven and earth were always meant to be united—one home for God and his people together. The Bible's Story is built on the foundation of God's good creation, which includes full, flourishing life in God's world, with all its members properly related to their Creator and to each other.

— Act Two: —

HUMANITY'S REBELLION

The image of a well-watered, creature-filled paradise is quickly shattered. God is there, walking through the garden in the cool part of the day, looking for the man and woman. But they are hiding from him, fearful of the consequences of their act of distrust and rebellion. They have been misled and deceived by God's enemy—the serpent and Accuser—turning away from God to become a law unto themselves. Rather than following the wisdom of the One who made the world, the people have decided to go their own way.

So Adam and Eve are thrust from God's garden and blocked from

returning. They will now face a land and a life apart from God's blessing. This is the first of many exiles in the Bible's big Story—people forced from their homes and away from God's presence. In a real sense, the Bible's entire Story is about God's work to bring humanity back to his garden, his dwelling place, his temple home.

From this point on, humanity's wrongdoing is presented as a radical departure from God's founding vision. The Story goes quickly downhill with all the well-known failures of human history on full display. Jealousy, hatred, vengeance, loneliness, shame, and acts of violence all come to play their destructive parts in the drama. God's heart is broken. In a major divine reset, he even decides to wipe humanity from the earth in a great flood, saving only Noah's family and a pair of each of the earth's animals.

Humanity has fallen into disrepair; they still rule the world, but very badly. The creation is wounded. Where abundant life in and with God was intended, sin and death now invade and infect everything. God's efforts to overcome this rebellion create the primary conflict in the Bible's ongoing drama. Restoration and reconciliation are what God will be striving for, and always with humanity as his intended partner.

But we're early in the saga, and at this point it's more about questions than answers. Will God in fact be able to quell the revolt? Can humanity be healed and restored, drawn back into faithful relationship with the Creator? How could this possibly happen? What will God's plan be? What about everything else God made? Does the rest of creation have a future beyond this calamity?

——— *Act Three:* ———

ISRAEL'S QUEST

What happens in the Bible is a series of ongoing steps by the Creator to re-establish what he intended from the outset. God's Story is big, encompassing all things, but it is also always personal.

God calls a man, Abram (later called Abraham) from Ur of the Chaldeans, and brings him to a new land, a new future, a new hope. God starts by making promises: *You are small now Abram, but I will make you great—your name, your family, and your blessing, which will be for everyone.* The seed for humanity's renewal and the creation's restoration is planted with this one man and the family and nation that will come from him—the twelve tribes of Israel.

These promises from God fit a regular pattern in the Story. Big moves forward happen when God makes covenants or agreements at key moments in the Story. These covenants start with God making pledges but also include the expectation of a faithful response by his people. We see this next when Abraham's descendants are in deep distress in Egypt. They are outside of the land God promised them and have become a nation of slaves. So

God comes down to act with power to save his people, working with a new leader, Moses. God then makes a covenant with the entire nation of Israel at Mount Sinai.

This decisive action for Israel also creates another pattern that will show up in the Story—*exodus*. The word means “departure,” but in the Bible it comes to represent all the elements of God’s salvation for Israel:

- freedom from slavery and oppression;
- a covenant relationship between God the Father and his children;
- the revelation of God’s instructions for living;
- God coming down to live among his people in the Tabernacle or Temple;
- the provision of manna (bread) in the wilderness;
- offerings and sacrifices to atone for sins and reconcile God and his people;
- the gift of a promised new land filled with God’s blessings.

Israel is now to be a “display” people—a nation of priests and a light to all nations, showing the world who God is and what it means to follow him. The land of Israel is meant to be a re-creation of God’s garden at the beginning of the Bible. Working with one nation, God sets out to recover his original intentions for all creation.

Most of the First Testament is a commentary on Israel’s faithfulness (or not) to this vocation. Sadly, Israel regularly fails, breaking God’s covenant by ignoring his instructions for justice and right living and by worshiping other gods. The people of Israel, like Adam and Eve at the beginning, often choose to do whatever they think is right in their own eyes.

But God is patient and keeps reaching out to his people. Through his servants the prophets he both invites and warns his people to stay faithful to their covenant relationship with him. He makes another covenant with Israel’s great King David, promising that his offspring will have an enduring kingdom and will rule forever. Israel’s hope is tied to this royal line. The prophets envision a future king who will honor God, teach God’s ways, and defeat Israel’s enemies.

Abraham’s family has been raised up to undo the downfall of Adam and Eve. But Israel persists in idolatry and injustice, refusing to repent and become the nation God called them to be. In anger and dismay, God is compelled to force Israel into exile in Babylon, away from his presence in the Temple. The nation is invaded, Jerusalem is smashed and burned, and the people are once again enslaved. This is devastating for the Bible’s Story. Israel was meant to be God’s answer, the means by which blessing comes back to all peoples. But now God’s plan seems in shambles.

Once again, the Story is filled with questions: Can Israel be saved? Can this entire drama be saved? Has God’s plan for redemption failed? Can he find a way to bring his favor, healing, restoration, and life back to his broken world?

— *Act Four:* —

KING'S ADVENT

In the years before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Empire of Rome was already proclaiming its own version of the good news. The gods, it said, had ordained that the powerful and virtuous leader Caesar Augustus should rule the world. He is “a savior for us and those who come after us, to make war to cease, to create order everywhere. The birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning for the world of the gospel [good news] that has come to men through him” (from the Priene Calendar Inscription in Asia Minor, ca. 9 BC). The world is a place of competing stories, and Rome’s story is the dominant one when Jesus enters our saga.

By this time Israel has been suffering under foreign domination for several centuries. The people are wondering when God will finally fulfill all his ancient promises to them. Different groups are offering various visions of Israel’s future. The Pharisees and teachers of the law urge people to get more serious about following Israel’s distinctive way of life under God’s law. Zealots advocate violent rebellion against Rome. The leaders running the rebuilt Jerusalem Temple protect their power by making compromises with their Roman overlords.

Into this tumultuous world comes a new rabbi, a wandering teacher who makes a single astonishing claim: The reign of God is returning to this world. This means Israel’s long exile is ending. God is offering the nation forgiveness and renewal. Jesus demonstrates the truth of his message with mighty signs, showing that God’s Spirit is with him. Jesus heals, forgives, raises the dead, and overpowers the dark forces that have been harming God’s people. In both word and deed Jesus announces the arrival of God’s Kingdom.

The leaders with other agendas reject the invitation and work to undermine Jesus, so his words of welcome turn to words of warning. A great catastrophe will come upon the nation if this last and greatest messenger from God is rejected. The opposition persists, and the conflict with Israel’s leaders comes to a head while Jesus is in the city of Jerusalem.

In his final week, Jesus’ identity is revealed openly, not just as a rabbi or prophet, but as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. Jesus claims to be the Son of David. He had been baptized in the Jordan River, symbolizing a new beginning for the nation. He had chosen twelve disciples as a sign that the twelve tribes of Israel were being reborn. Now he claims authority over the Temple and cleanses it by driving out the merchants selling sacrifices there. This happens during Israel’s annual celebration of the Exodus, and Jesus shares a final Passover meal with his disciples. He means for this to show that he is about to initiate a great act of rescue and salvation—a new exodus. Jesus tells his followers that his death will launch the new covenant with Israel promised by the prophets. This is the decisive moment for God’s Kingdom to come with power.

Finally Israel's leaders arrest Jesus and hand him over to the Romans for execution. He is nailed to a cross, with a sign that mocks him as "The King of the Jews." It certainly looks as though Jesus has lost his bid to establish God's rule and that he is no king after all. But three days later he is vindicated, rising from the dead and appearing to his disciples.

It turns out that Jesus willingly went to his death as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Through this sacrifice, he wins a surprising victory over the spiritual powers of darkness. Rome was never the real enemy. Jesus has taken on sin and death directly—ironically, through his own death—emptying them of their power over humanity. His resurrection confirms his triumph. This unexpected story of Israel's Messiah reveals God's long-term plan. All the earlier covenants were leading to this one. The life and ministry of Jesus brings all the narrative threads in the Scriptures together into a single, coherent Story. Through Jesus, God has launched his new creation.

— Act Five: —

COMMUNITY'S CALLING

Israel was chosen in order to bring blessing to all peoples. Israel's Messiah is the One through whom this ancient promise comes true. The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father, now with authority over all things—this is the centerpiece and fulfillment of the Bible's long and winding tale. The work of Jesus—sent by the Father and empowered by the Spirit—is where the Story finds the redemption and restoration it's been leading toward all along.

But how will the world hear this good news about the victory of Jesus? When the risen Jesus first appeared to his disciples, he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." The followers of Jesus have been given a mission. To a world enslaved by evil powers, caught in wrongdoing and idolatry, now freedom and forgiveness are to be announced. To a world confused by misplaced allegiances, Jesus is to be proclaimed as Lord and King. To a world divided by social, ethnic, and tribal differences, a single new humanity in God's family is to be disclosed. Abraham's family—renewed through the Messiah—is commissioned to bring this message to all creation.

The mission of God expands through the birth and growth of new communities of Jesus followers. Faith and loyalty to Jesus are now the key marks of the renewed people of God. These believers are God's new temple, the place where he dwells. God is worshiped in Spirit and in truth. God's justice is embraced; his love is lived out. By not only believing in Jesus but also following his teachings and walking in his ways, God's people are remade in his image. They are called back to the original human vocation of reflecting God's gracious rule to the creation.

We are living in this act of the Bible's drama today. If we are true to our calling and restoration in this second Adam—that is, in Jesus—we will follow his pattern of suffering servanthood for the sake of others. We are called to appropriately improvise our own roles in God's saving Story based on what we have learned by reading the Scriptures in depth. In community we work out together what the way of Jesus looks like in the new places and situations where God has placed us. And we continue to pray and long for the return of our King.

——— *Act Six:* ———

GOD'S HOMECOMING

The Bible's Story begins with God pushing back the powers of chaos and disorder to create a place of beauty and goodness. But the powers returned, bringing wrongdoing and rebellion into God's creation-temple. God's image bearers failed him. The entire narrative since then has been about God working, striving, and even fighting to cleanse and reestablish his intended home. The decisive turn comes when the Creator actually becomes a creature himself, completely joining with his people to help and empower their battle against evil.

The finale of this great drama still lies ahead of us. The Servant-King will return to join his people once again. Jesus will appear as the world's rightful Judge and Ruler, setting all things right. Evil will be destroyed and creation renewed. The world's bondage to sorrow and pain and its slavery to violence, death, and decay will be overturned once and for all. All things will be made new. The glory of God will fill the entire cosmos—his temple. The victory of the God of life will be complete.

God's people will be raised from the dead in fully human, fully restored physical bodies. They will reengage their first calling—to be Spirit-filled, God-worshipping, culture-making citizens of God's new heavens and new earth. Peoples from every tribe, language, and nation will walk by God's light and bring splendor and glory into God's city—the new Jerusalem. God will come down and make his home with us here in his reawakened creation.

"Arise, O LORD, and enter your resting place, . . .
may your loyal servants sing for joy."

from PSALM 132

IMMERSED IN LUKE - ACTS

THE LONGEST STORY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT—one that fills a quarter of its pages—was originally addressed to one person. The author dedicates this two-volume series, covering the life of Jesus and the early church, to the “most honorable Theophilus.” This Greek name shows that he was a Gentile (non-Jewish), and his title suggests he was likely a Roman official.

This history of the early Christian movement was written in the mid-60s AD, right around the time when the Roman government first became hostile to Jesus’ followers. Theophilus may have been facing pressure to forsake his allegiance to Jesus. At the same time, some Jewish believers were questioning the place of Gentiles in a movement devoted to a Jewish Messiah. So Theophilus would no doubt welcome the reassurance that what he’d heard about Jesus was genuine and that the Good News really was intended for Gentiles like himself.

Luke was in a unique position to answer these questions. He had worked closely with Paul, who brought the message of Jesus to Gentiles living throughout much of the Roman Empire. Luke was able to tell important parts of the story from firsthand experience. And since he was educated and literate, he could also research and record the movement’s history.

The Good News of Jesus invited Jews and Gentiles to unite into a single new family. So believers from all backgrounds benefited from Luke’s account of God’s story of salvation for the whole world, which had come to surprising fulfillment in Jesus.

The first volume—Luke—begins with a prologue about the remarkable circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth and early days. From its start, the story shows how Jesus was sent as both the long-promised King of Israel and the Savior of the whole world.

After the introduction, Luke is divided into three main parts:

The first section describes Jesus’ early ministry in Israel’s northern region of Galilee, where he announces “the Good News of the Kingdom of God.”

Luke then portrays Jesus taking the journey south toward Jerusalem, where he fulfills his calling and destiny. Along the way, Jesus continues

to show how the coming of God's reign on earth means freedom for the oppressed and a welcome for outsiders.

The third section shows Jesus' mission coming to its climax in Israel's ancient capital of Jerusalem. During the Jewish Passover festival, his enemies conspire to have him executed on a Roman cross. But Jesus then rises from the dead with royal authority, winning God's great battle against sin and death.

The second volume—Acts—describes how the first community of Jesus' followers brought the message about him to all nations. In six different phases, the Good News about Jesus breaks through some significant barrier as it advances. Each phase ends with a version of the summary statement: "God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased."

Phase one: The message breaks through a linguistic barrier as the Jerusalem community welcomes Greek speakers (pp. 61-70).

Phase two: The message breaks through a geographic barrier by spreading into Judea and Samaria (pp. 70-77).

Phase three: A significant religious and ethnic barrier is broken when the community welcomes Gentiles (pp. 77-82).

Phase four: Another geographic barrier is broken when the Good News moves into Asia Minor (pp. 82-89).

Phase five: Yet another geographic barrier is broken when the Good News spreads into Greece, the cultural center of the ancient Mediterranean world (pp. 89-94).

Phase six: The Good News about Jesus the Messiah reaches all the way to Rome—the very heart of the empire (pp. 95-110).

In this way, Luke–Acts completes its twofold movement. First, Jesus went to Jerusalem to complete his great work through his suffering, death, and resurrection. Second, the persecution of his followers brought the Good News about Jesus from Jerusalem to Rome. In this combined story, it is revealed that Jesus is Israel's promised King and the world's true Ruler.

LUKE



Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.



When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will

turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”

Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”

Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail.”

Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

Mary responded,

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.
For the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.
He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.
His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.
He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands.
He has helped his servant Israel
and remembered to be merciful.
For he made this promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children forever."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!"

"What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. Everyone who heard about it

reflected on these events and asked, “What will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.

Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has visited and redeemed his people.

He has sent us a mighty Savior
from the royal line of his servant David,
just as he promised
through his holy prophets long ago.

Now we will be saved from our enemies
and from all who hate us.

He has been merciful to our ancestors
by remembering his sacred covenant—
the covenant he swore with an oath
to our ancestor Abraham.

We have been rescued from our enemies
so we can serve God without fear,
in holiness and righteousness
for as long as we live.

“And you, my little son,
will be called the prophet of the Most High,
because you will prepare the way for the Lord.

You will tell his people how to find salvation
through forgiveness of their sins.

Because of God’s tender mercy,
the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
and to guide us to the path of peace.”

John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

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At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.