



## Luke 1:1–2

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word.

### Reflection

A lot can happen in a generation. It's the year AD 60, or thereabouts. And since the

death and resurrection of Jesus almost thirty years ago Christianity has spread like wildfire through the ancient world. In barely a generation, the church, just 120 people at Pentecost, now numbers in the tens of thousands; small and growing communities scattered right throughout the Roman Empire. This explosive growth has come about by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the eyewitness testimonies of that first generation of Christians who witnessed the resurrected Jesus and were prepared to die to see the good news about him spread.

James the brother of Jesus, Peter the leader of Jesus' disciples, Paul, the famous murderer of Christians turned evangelist, and John the 'beloved disciple' and Jesus' closest friend, have each led mis-

sions to different parts of the Mediterranean world. As have countless other unnamed followers of Jesus, many of them eyewitnesses to his life and teaching, and not a few of them with living memories of Jesus dying and coming back to life. You see, in the forty days after Jesus rose from the dead he appeared physically to many of his followers. In 1 Corinthians 15 for instance, we read of him appearing to more than five hundred people at one time; and people like these have carried the memory of the day they saw Jesus back from dead with them to the four corners of the Roman Empire. Because there can be no more important news for all of humankind than that Jesus has defeated death and through him we can too.

But this first generation is dying out. Jesus'

disciples are aging or being martyred, and great persecution is breaking out against the Christian faith which means that fewer and fewer people can speak first-hand about their experience of Jesus. An early history of the church describes how Peter, preaching in synagogues and home churches, ‘used to adapt his instructions to the needs [of the moment]’ drawing readily on whichever of his vivid recollections of Jesus was most appropriate for the audience at hand. But soon there would be no more Peter, or any of that first generation. It was time to take these living memories – the countless eyewitness testimonies of the parables, stories, healings and miracles of Jesus – and set them down on paper for future generations.

And so amongst the four mission fields of

Peter, James, Paul and John arose four Gospels, that is, four collections of eyewitness accounts, four biographies of Jesus Christ – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It's likely that Mark's gospel was the first. Mark was a second-generation Christian who translated for Peter; they had a father-son type relationship, we can almost see Peter looking over Mark's shoulder as he writes. Matthew and Luke soon followed, influenced by the ministries of James and Paul. They incorporated Mark's work and added in other eyewitness accounts to write much fuller gospels. And lastly John, who wrote independently, and much later than the others.

But today, and for the remainder of this year, we turn to the Gospel of Luke – friend, travelling companion and personal physi-

cian of the apostle Paul. Let me read from today's passage, from Luke 1:1–2,

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word.

The first generation of Christians may be dying out but the gospel is running more rapidly than ever through the Gentile world. Soon there will be no eyewitnesses left to teach this new generation of Christians about Jesus. It's time for these lived memories and oral stories to be set down for perpetuity. And Luke begins his Gospel by saying that many in fact have undertaken to do just this. Our passage

again,

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And even from these first couple of verses we get a very good idea as to why Luke has decided to try his hand at writing a biography of Jesus. In the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, and the world-language of the New Testament era, verses 1 to 4 of Luke chapter 1 are a single sentence. This single sentence has been described stylistically as the most perfect sentence in the New Testament. Its style and cadence mark Luke as a scholar

of the highest order but more importantly its form marks Luke's gospel as a work of history. Not philosophy, or fiction, or a political or even religious work but a work of history. If you were to read the great ancient Jewish works like 2 Maccabees, the Jewish historian Josephus, or the Greek historian Lucian, you would find that ancient histories usually opened with a short explanation of the work. And very deliberately this is exactly how Luke begins,

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With stylistically the most perfect sentence



in the New Testament Luke presents himself as an historian and thus shouts to the ancient world and to us that he is writing about history that must not be ignored. With great competency and thoroughness Luke is about to set down the historical facts about Jesus Christ; the stories of Jesus' miracles, healings, teaching, death and resurrection that have been told and retold by eyewitnesses of these events. What will follow is an orderly account by a medical doctor, a scholar, an historian and close travelling companion of the apostle Paul detailing in spacious and beautiful detail the life of Jesus so that the second generation of believers and every generation subsequent 'may know with certainty of the things that [they] have been taught' (1:4).

## Think

Christianity is a religion built on historical facts; the testimony of eyewitnesses carefully recorded, handed down and infused with the Holy Spirit's power. The Christian faith is grounded in the real events of an extraordinary figure with an extraordinary story that Luke is about to unfold before our eyes. Have you carefully investigated the facts about Jesus Christ? His words, his teaching, the compelling evidence that the New Testament writers lay before us about his death and resurrection? Because if this is real, it changes everything. If not, will you come on this journey with us in Luke's Gospel, led by someone from the first century who has?

And if you are a follower of Jesus I'd like

you to consider today the power of personal testimony. Personal testimony about Jesus is how this all began. It's how the early church exploded and how Christianity has always spread. What is your testimony? Your findings? What is your eyewitness account of Jesus working powerfully in your life through his Spirit and his word? And who are you going to tell this year?

## **Pray**

Pray today that many would come with us on this journey in Luke's Gospel and along the way that they would find Jesus. Pray also that this year for you would be one of great personal testimony about who Jesus is and what he means to you. Because a lot can happen in our generation too.