

## Luke's Jesus

The Compassionate and Saving Son of God

*Eric D. Huntsman*

The familiar, poetic lines by Anna Bartlett Warner (1824–1915) reflect a gentle, uncomplicated understanding of who Jesus is, what he is like, and what he has done for us:

*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.*

*Little ones to him belong; they are weak, but he is strong.*

*Jesus loves me—he who died, heaven's gate to open wide.*

*He will wash away my sin, let his little child come in.<sup>1</sup>*

Written in 1859 and appearing in many Christian hymnals and songbooks since,<sup>2</sup> this children's favorite assumes that the Bible presents a uniform, simple portrayal of Jesus. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, the New Testament texts actually present many different portraits of the figure whom Latter-day Saints and other Christians accept as the Son of God. Still, if one of these sources contributed disproportionately in shaping the depiction of Jesus as

a kind, compassionate, but still divine Savior of the world, it might well be the image painted by the Gospel of Luke. Nevertheless, this Gospel's presentation of Jesus is anything but simple and unsophisticated. Rather it is a carefully crafted literary account that drew upon its sources and the cultural context from which it emerged. Perhaps above all, the Gospel of Luke is informed by its author's sensitivities and shaped by his own understanding of *who* Jesus was and *what* he had come to do.

Traditionally the evangelist who wrote this Gospel has been identified as Luke, the missionary companion and "beloved physician" of Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; and Philemon 1:24), who seems to have written it sometime in the seventies or eighties.<sup>3</sup> As the third of the Synoptic Gospels, Luke follows the basic order of the Marcan narrative, weaving into it many of the sayings of Jesus that are also found in Matthew. Nevertheless, Luke contains more unique material—such as the so-called Perea ministry, some unique sayings, and other episodes—than either of the other two Synoptics.<sup>4</sup> Although Luke's connection with the source of John's Gospel is unclear, similarities between some portions of the Lucan passion and resurrection narratives and the later Fourth Gospel also allow Luke to serve as a theological bridge between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John.<sup>5</sup> Generally assumed to have been written by a Greek for a largely gentile audience, this Gospel is characterized by both universalism—or the import of Jesus and his work for all peoples—and a patent concern for outsiders and the oppressed, such as gentiles, women, the poor, and others on the margins of society. Nevertheless, the author was very familiar with the Judaism of his time and drew freely from the Septuagint, or Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

The result is not only a higher Christology than that of Mark or even Matthew but also one that has several unique aspects. This Lucan presentation of Jesus is particularly evident in the christological titles he uses or the roles that he describes, designations which, while largely drawn from Jewish scripture, often had resonance with

similar titles in the Roman world. While these titles are often common to the other Gospels, their frequency in Luke or his particular use of them often differentiates his portrait of Jesus from theirs. These include identifying Jesus as Savior, the anointed Servant of God, Redeemer, the Lord, and Son of God. Luke's depiction is also influenced by its author's own sensitivities, resulting in the Lucan emphasis on Jesus's obedience and suffering, his healing ministry, and his compassion and mercy. Above all, Luke's tendency to retroject later Christian terminology and perspectives onto the identity and work of the mortal Jesus arose out of his conviction that the earthly and heavenly Jesus were the same Risen Lord that the evangelist worshipped.<sup>7</sup> Because Luke's understanding of this Risen Lord so informed his Christology, his reverence for Jesus restrained him from portraying any of Jesus's human limitations and kept him from preserving instances where the disciples might have displayed any irreverence for the Lord.<sup>8</sup> The result was a divine yet gentle, lordly but loving Jesus that in many ways reflects the Jesus assumed by Anna Bartlett Warner and countless others.

### **Promised Savior**

Like Matthew, the Gospel of Luke begins with an infancy narrative. Whereas Mark begins his Gospel account with Jesus's baptism and ministry (Mark 1:2–15) and John starts his with an account of the Word “in the beginning” (John 1:1–3), these infancy narratives present what can be called a “conception Christology” that stresses that Jesus was divinely conceived and miraculously born.<sup>9</sup> Set as the introductions of their respective Gospels, when taken with the passion and resurrection narratives that conclude Matthew and Luke, these infancy narratives serve as christological frames, demonstrating both who Jesus was and what he came to do. While serving similar functions, the Matthean and Lucan infancy narratives are nonetheless distinctive and not easily harmonized because they draw upon

different sources, focus on different episodes and themes, and emphasize different aspects of the identity of the newborn Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

The Lucan infancy narrative provides a bridge with the Septuagint, connecting its characters with the history of Israel and showing how God continued his salvific work in the person of his Son.<sup>11</sup> Much of it consists of two interwoven stories, those of John the Baptist and Jesus, resulting in what is sometimes called the Lucan diptych, a description that comes from the term used for a double-paneled painting or carving. This literary structure emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus by comparing and contrasting the two stories. The births of both promised children were preceded by angelic annunciations, the children were miraculously conceived, and their births took place under unusual circumstances; however, Mary responded differently than Zacharias, Jesus was divinely rather than just miraculously conceived, and Jesus was born in unusually humble circumstances while John was born at home surrounded by family and friends. Finally, while Zacharias prophesied at his son's birth, angels sang at Jesus's birth.<sup>12</sup>

While there is some question whether Matthew and Luke wrote their infancy narratives first or, more likely, after the bodies of their Gospels were completed,<sup>13</sup> these opening chapters nonetheless serve as "Gospel overtures," setting forth the major themes and motifs, including christological titles and propositions, that recur throughout the rest of Matthew and Luke.<sup>14</sup> Thus while the major purpose of Luke's infancy narrative is to stress that Jesus was actually the Son of God from the moment of his conception, other aspects of Luke's Christology are also introduced in these opening chapters. One aspect that is quite distinctive to Luke is the image of Jesus as the promised Savior. This title first occurs in the opening of the canticle, or poetic song, known as the *Magnificat*, in which Mary, during her visit to Elisabeth, sings,

My soul doth magnify the Lord,

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my *Saviour*.

(Luke 1:46–47; emphasis added)

The title “Savior,” or deliverer (Hebrew, *mōšīā*<sup>5</sup>; Greek, *sōtēr*), was one frequently used of God in the Old Testament,<sup>15</sup> but it is surprisingly rare in the New, especially in the Gospels, where it appears twice in Luke and only once in John.<sup>16</sup> Given the context and the Old Testament models—such as the song of Hannah—for the *Magnificat*, the meaning here is no doubt consonant with Jewish thought and expectation, namely of a national and perhaps, by extension, spiritual deliverer.

The meaning of the term broadens, however, the second time it is used in Luke, this time in the mouth of a heavenly witness when the angel announces to the shepherds, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you *good tidings* of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David *a Saviour*, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11; emphasis added). While Luke’s use here would clearly have been influenced by Old Testament precedent,<sup>17</sup> it was also a term that his audience would have known well from Hellenistic and imperial Roman propaganda, where it was frequently used of rulers who were benefactors to their subjects, bringing peace, security, and prosperity.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Luke’s account compares interestingly to the proclamation of Priene, a Greek city in Asia Minor, regarding the emperor Augustus that dates to 9 BC, just shortly before the birth of Jesus: “Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as *a savior*, both for us and for our descendants; . . . the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the *good tidings* for the world.”<sup>19</sup>

While the title Savior does not appear again in the Lucan text, forms of the verb *save* (*sōzō*) appear eleven more times,<sup>20</sup> and it is implied in the infancy narrative and elsewhere in the Gospel by the depiction of Jesus as the bringer of salvation and redemption. In the *Benedictus*, for instance, Zacharias prophesies,

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel;  
for he hath visited and *redeemed* his people,

And hath raised up an horn of *salvation* for us  
in the house of his servant David.

(Luke 1:68–69; emphasis added)

At the end of this canticle, he concludes by stating that his son, John, would “give knowledge of *salvation* unto his people” (1:77) and “give *light* to them that sit in darkness” (1:79), light being a symbol here of salvation.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, at the Presentation of Jesus in the temple, in the *Nunc dimittis* Simeon sings,

For mine eyes have seen thy *salvation*,  
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;  
A *light* to lighten the Gentiles,  
and the glory of thy people Israel.

(Luke 2:30–32; emphasis added)

Picking up the imagery of Isaiah 60:1–3, this canticle explicitly extends salvation to the gentiles as well as to Israel, even as the title *sôtēr*, or Savior, applied in both a Jewish and a Greco-Roman context. Finally, Anna, in her prophetic parallel to Simeon’s proclamation, “gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for *redemption* in Jerusalem” (2:38).

Salvation appears again as an important term in Luke,<sup>22</sup> and, as we will see, Luke expands the idea of redemption in his portrayal of Jesus as a healing redeemer. Yet even though the title “Savior” only appears twice in this Gospel, its impact on our understanding of Jesus far outweighs its frequency. Further, because Savior is such a common term in Restoration scripture—appearing twelve times in the Book of Mormon, nineteen times in the Doctrine and Covenants, and four times in the Pearl of Great Price—it is a christological title and concept that Latter-day Saint readers find particularly familiar and beloved in Luke.

## Anointed Servant of God

The pattern of Jesus always doing the will of his Father is established in the story of the boy Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:49), and once established at the end of the “overture,” it is a theme throughout the Gospel.<sup>23</sup> Although we generally see being about his “Father’s business” as a testimony that Jesus was God’s Son, it is also part of the larger theme of Jesus, like the prophets before him, being God’s obedient servant. As does Matthew, Luke compares Jesus to the prophet Moses by including the forty-day period in the wilderness that precedes the temptation narrative (Luke 4:1–2; compare Matthew 4:1–2). While prophecy had lapsed among the Jews by this period, Luke then presents John the Baptist and especially Jesus as the “Prophet” promised by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15.<sup>24</sup> When Jesus returns from the wilderness to his hometown of Nazareth,<sup>25</sup> however, Luke takes the image of the promised prophet and weds it to the anointed servant foretold in the later prophecies of Isaiah. In what is in many ways the programmatic passage of the entire Gospel,<sup>26</sup> Jesus takes up the scroll in the synagogue in Nazareth and reads a version of Isaiah 61:1–2:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
 because *he hath anointed me* to preach the gospel to the  
 poor;  
 he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,  
 to preach deliverance to the captives,  
 and recovering of sight to the blind,  
 to set at liberty them that are bruised,  
 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

(Luke 4:18–19; emphasis added)<sup>27</sup>

When Luke has Jesus say “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (4:21), he presents Jesus as the one especially chosen, authorized, and sent to preach the good news of the kingdom through a ministry to the poor, sick, and marginalized.

Not limiting himself to words related to *save* (Greek, *sōzō*), in this passage Luke expands Jesus's work of redemption to healing, deliverance, and recovery.<sup>28</sup> These activities are then seen by the people as the work of God's chosen prophet. For instance, after the raising of the son of the widow of Nain, the people proclaim, "A great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people" (Luke 7:16). The people subsequently have different opinions of Jesus, comparing him with this or that prophet (Luke 9:7–8, 18–19), and as late as the day of the resurrection, some of his own followers are still considering him "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (Luke 24:19).

More significantly, the reference to anointing in the Isaiah 61 passage that Jesus reads identifies him as Messiah or Christ, since the Hebrew *māšîaḥ* and the Greek *christos* both mean "anointed one."<sup>29</sup> While many Jews in Jesus's time would have expected Messiah to have been an anointed Davidic king or other deliverer figure,<sup>30</sup> after the resurrection and by the time Luke wrote, "Christ" had become preeminent title among Christians for the Risen Lord. Because of Luke's tendency to read contemporary terminology back into Jesus's ministry, it is not surprising that Luke favors this title, using it sixteen times in the Gospel and an additional thirty-one times in Acts.<sup>31</sup> While the title is used by the angels and Simeon in the infancy narrative (Luke 2:11, 26), the number of times that Christ is used directly of Jesus in his ministry is small until the passion narrative. Other than the testimony of devils (4:41), as in the other Synoptics, only Peter at Caesarea Philippi confesses that Jesus is "Christ" (9:20). Rather, Luke reserves this title for discussions of who Jesus is, or is not, during his final days and hours (20:41; 21:8; 22:67; 23:2, 35, 39). Only in his resurrection appearances to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and to the gathered eleven does Jesus use the title of himself (24:26, 46), in both cases connecting it with the necessity of his suffering.

The necessity of Jesus's suffering also connects him with the suffering servant of the LORD (*ʿebed YHWH*) of Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah



42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), a figure that personified vicarious suffering for the purpose of restoring the covenant relationship between God and his people.<sup>32</sup> While the other evangelists, especially Matthew, knew this concept, Luke develops it thematically throughout his Gospel. Beginning with examples of his rejection, starting with his expulsion from Nazareth, it focuses with Jesus's steadfast decision to go to Jerusalem, since "it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33–35). It culminates in Jesus's willing and passive deportment in the Lucan passion narrative,<sup>33</sup> especially seen in his refusal to speak to Herod Antipas or answer other charges against him, fulfilling Isaiah 53:7, which prophesied,

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth:  
he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb,  
so he openeth not his mouth.

Also frequently associated with the theme of a willing, suffering servant are some of Luke's uses of the expression "Son of Man." A much discussed but elusive title, it appears eighty-five times in the Gospels, all but once in the mouth of Jesus, and only four times elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> Although in Restoration scripture it means "Son of Man of Holiness" (see Moses 6:57; 7:53; D&C 78:20; 95:17), in the New Testament it seems to arise from its common Old Testament usage, where it means "a mortal," and from its particular use in Daniel 7:13–14 and intertestamental literature, where it refers to an eschatological figure coming from God in the last days with power and authority.<sup>35</sup> As with the other Synoptics, Lucan usage seems to fall into four categories, reflecting Jesus's mortality, divine authority, suffering in his coming passion, and future role of returning with glory.<sup>36</sup> In each of these instances, Jesus is the unique servant of God.

## Healing Redeemer

Healing miracles are a prominent part of Jesus's ministry in all four of the Gospels, and Jesus's rescuing people from physical infirmities can be seen as symbolic of his larger redeeming work. Perhaps because of Luke's conventional identification as a physician, they receive particular attention in his Gospel, as he often adds details to healings common to the other Synoptics or preserves miracles not mentioned in the others.<sup>37</sup> In particular, in harmony with Luke's wider interest in women, he records instances of healing women not preserved elsewhere, including Mary Magdalene and the female followers from Galilee (Luke 8:1–3) as well as the woman bent over with a debilitating infirmity (13:10–17). As with the accounts in Mark and Matthew, frequently when Jesus heals someone, Luke uses the same Greek phrase, *pistis sou sesōken se*, which the King James translation usually renders as “thy faith hath made thee whole” (see Mark 5:34; 10:52; Matthew 9:22; Luke 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). In fact, the therapeutic context of these miracles has led LDS scholars Fiona and Terryl Givens to suggest that perhaps the verb *sōzō* here should be interpreted “heal.”<sup>38</sup> Literally, however, *sōzō*, means “save,” and is translated that way in the King James Bible in one of the Lucan passages under consideration, when Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus and announces, “Receive thy sight: thy faith hath *saved* thee” (Luke 18:42). Clearly, Jesus saw his healing ministry as part of his larger saving work as he freed people from their infirmities.<sup>39</sup>

Another instance in Luke where Jesus used the expression *pistis sou sesōken se* extends the concept to the idea of spiritual healing. In the story of the woman who washed Jesus's feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and then anointed them, Jesus forgave her because of her great love for him, saying, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace” (Luke 7:50). In the earlier miracle of healing the man with palsy, Jesus had combined physical healing with forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:1–12; Matthew 9:1–8; Luke 5:17–26), suggesting that salvation includes both the body and the spirit. Physical healing and

forgiveness are both acts of redemption whereby Jesus ransoms, or redeems, men and women from the effects of the fall that separates us from God and makes us prone to sickness and sin.

Deliverance from the power of the devil can serve as a type of how Jesus redeems us from the power of the fall. As do the other Synoptics, Luke records instances of Jesus's freeing people from demonic possession (Luke 4:33–37; 8:26–39; 9:37–42; 11:14), but he also uses exorcism terminology in what are clearly physical healings.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Jesus “rebukes” (Greek, *epetimēsen*) the fever of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law using the same term that is used elsewhere for rebuking and casting out devils (4:39). Similarly, when healing the woman who was bent over from some disability, he describes her as suffering from “a spirit of infirmity” and indicates that Jesus “loosed” (Greek, *apolelusai*) her from her disability (13:11–12). In both cases, Luke treats a physical ailment as an enemy to be subdued or a bondage from which the victims must be freed.<sup>41</sup>

While “Redeemer” is not a title that appears in the New Testament,<sup>42</sup> the concept of God or his servant as being a personal and national redeemer was an important promise in the Old Testament, especially in the later writings of Isaiah.<sup>43</sup> Redemption, however, does continue to figure in the Lucan narrative, both in Jesus’s prophecy of his return in the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21:28) and in the hopes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (24:21). The revelation of the Risen Lord to these two disciples resonates, in fact, with the testimony of Job. Just as they “trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel” (24:21), so Job is described as proclaiming, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth” (Job 19:25). Beyond these explicit references to redemption, however, the healing and spiritually liberating ministry of Jesus is a constant reminder of his redeeming work. As with Savior, Redeemer is a term much used in the Church today, appearing forty-one times in the Book of Mormon, twenty-two times in the Doctrine and Covenants, once in the Pearl of Great Price, and in the beloved hymn “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,”

which appeared in the first Latter-day Saint hymnbook and has been frequently sung ever since.

## Compassionate, Merciful Lord

The title “Lord” (Greek, *kyrios*) appears eighty-three times in Luke, more frequently than in any of the other Gospels.<sup>44</sup> The term’s usage, however, is broad, having as many as four possible meanings. These include its simple use for “master” or “owner”; as a form of polite address, meaning simply “sir”; in a courtly sense when used of a social superior; and, significantly, as a Greek translation of the Hebrew term *’adōnay*, which was regularly used to substitute for the divine name YHWH, or “Jehovah.”<sup>45</sup> As a result, only the context of each occurrence can determine which meaning best applies. For instance, in stories such as the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:1–9) or the parable of the pounds (19:11–27), the “lord” is either the owner or master, and when individuals who do not know Jesus come and address him, they likely mean the polite “sir” (see, for example, the centurion in 7:6). On the other hand, in the Hellenistic and Roman context, *kyrios* was used for the gods of mystery religions as well as for the political rule of Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors,<sup>46</sup> which may have predisposed many of Luke’s readers to see one of the latter two uses in the title, and many of Luke’s references have one of these elevated meanings.

In fact, among the evangelists Luke alone regularly refers to Jesus as Lord in the narrative, probably reflecting the elevated usage among Christians in his own day.<sup>47</sup> However, the fact that Luke at times interweaves his own use of *kyrios* to refer to Jesus with his characters’ use of it in dialogue, as in the case of the Martha story of Luke 10:39–41, might suggest that original disciples used the term for Jesus in an elevated sense as well.<sup>48</sup> Significant are the instances where *kyrios* seems to reflect the Hebrew use of *’adōnay*. Particularly in the infancy narrative, Luke uses Lord to refer to YHWH, the God of Israel,<sup>49</sup> and many of his later uses of the title may also suggest the

divinity of Jesus. Contemporary Latter-day Saints are perhaps particularly receptive to this identification because of our understanding that the Jehovah of the Old Testament was, in most instances, the pre-mortal Jesus Christ.<sup>50</sup> Despite the frequent assumption that God in the Old Testament is associated with judgment, one of the most common descriptions of Jehovah in the Old Testament is *hesed*, or “loving kindness.”<sup>51</sup> This is the aspect of “the Lord” that regularly characterizes Jesus in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of Luke.

Most commonly the Septuagint translates *hesed* with the Greek term *eleos*, which means “mercy,” “compassion,” or “pity.” Especially in Luke, these very terms are common, helping paint the Lucan portrait of a compassionate, loving Jesus.<sup>52</sup> Of course, descriptions of Jesus’s compassion are not unique to Luke. For instance, early in the Marcan narrative, most manuscripts describe Jesus as having been moved with compassion when he encounters and then heals the first leper (Mark 1:41).<sup>53</sup> Likewise, before the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus had compassion on the hungry multitude (Mark 6:34; parallel Matthew 15:32). To these common Synoptic examples, however, Luke adds several others, such as Jesus’s having compassion at the plight of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:13–15) and the ten lepers (17:11–19). Additionally, while Jesus is always willing to heal those who needed it (9:11), he will not call down fire upon the Samaritan village that would not receive him, pronouncing, “For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (9:56). Further, only Luke adds that Jesus not only laments over Jerusalem (see Matthew 23:37–39) but actually weeps over it (Luke 19:41–44).<sup>54</sup>

Jesus is gentle with other characters in Luke, and the evangelist consciously downplays the failings of others, particularly his disciples, so that he does not need to portray Jesus as being harsh with them, as happens in the other Synoptics. For example, after Jesus’s first passion prediction in the other accounts, Peter impulsively rebukes Jesus, leading Jesus to scold him, calling him Satan (Mark 8:31–33; parallel Matthew 16:21–23). Luke, however, completely omits both Peter’s rebuke and Jesus’s harsh response, moving directly to other

teachings (see Luke 9:22–27). Similarly, while Luke acknowledges that Peter, James, and John failed to stay awake and watch with him in Gethsemane, he only mentions their falling asleep once as opposed to three times as in the other Synoptics and only refers to “disciples” rather than singling these three out (Luke 22:45; cf. Mark 14:32, 37–41; Matthew 26:36, 40–45). Further, in Luke Jesus considers others before himself, even in times of great duress, such as when he heals the ear of the servant of the high priest (Luke 22:50–51), comforts the weeping women of Jerusalem on the way to Calvary (23:27–31), and forgives his crucifiers and those who mock and mistreat him (23:34). He even takes time to teach and comfort the penitent malefactor even as he himself hangs on the cross (23:40–43).<sup>55</sup>

## Suffering Son of God

A distinctively Lucan characteristic is his clear identification of Jesus as God’s Son in the annunciation (Luke 1:32–33, 35), which contrasts with the more vague “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” of Matthew 1:20.<sup>56</sup> As representatives of YHWH, the kings of ancient Judah had been viewed as the Lord’s adoptive sons, which can be seen in the various royal psalms, in particular Psalm 2, which declared, “The LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Psalm 2:7).<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the prime example of such a divinely adopted and approved king, after David himself, was the ideal figure in an early prophecy of Isaiah:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:  
 and the government shall be upon his shoulder:  
 and his name shall be called  
 Wonderful Counsellor,  
 The mighty God,  
 The everlasting Father,  
*The Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 9:6; emphasis added and punctuation corrected)<sup>58</sup>

The royal title “Prince of Peace” finds an echo in the acclamation of the heavenly hosts in the canticle *Gloria in excelsis*:

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace, good will to men.

(Luke 2:14; emphasis added)<sup>59</sup>

While Luke’s gentile audience would have been well familiar with Greek and Roman myths in which heroes were frequently semi-divine children of godly and mortal parents, more pertinent would have been the titular style of Roman emperors. Augustus had begun using the element *Divi filius*, or “son of the God,” when his adoptive father Julius Caesar was decreed a god in 42 BC.<sup>60</sup> Given the role of Augustus in establishing the *Pax Romana*, or “Roman Peace,” the *Gloria in excelsis* would have had resonance to gentile readers of Luke as well.

Luke’s usage in his infancy narrative exceeded the idea of royal adoption or imperial acclamation: it presents Jesus as the divinely conceived Son of God who would come to establish peace on the earth. Nevertheless, Luke is restrained in how this truth is conveyed throughout the course of his Gospel. As in the other Synoptics, the surest source of this knowledge is from God himself, who proclaims Jesus his beloved Son at the baptism (Luke 3:22), a point which Luke reinforces with the final entry in Jesus’s genealogy (3:38). This happens again at the transfiguration (9:35). Likewise, Jesus himself implies that he is God’s Son by referring to God as his Father both as a boy in the temple and in a later Galilean prayer that is almost Johannine in its understanding of the unity of the Father and the Son (Luke 10:21–22; cf. Matthew 11:25–27).<sup>61</sup>

Otherwise, during Jesus’s ministry the only testimony of his divine Sonship comes from Satan or his devils (4:3, 9, 41; 8:21). While this follows the basic pattern of Mark and Matthew, a confession that Jesus is God’s Son never appears in the mouth of a human witness in Luke.<sup>62</sup> He omits the scene of Jesus walking on the water, which leads the disciples to say, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God”

(Matthew 14:33), and like Mark, Luke does not expand Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is the Christ to include "the Son of the living God" as does Matthew (Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20; Matthew 16:16). He even alters the powerful christological declaration of the centurion at the foot of the cross, changing it from "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39; parallel Matthew 27:54) to "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47).

Not using this title for the adult Jesus as a miracle worker or a teacher, Luke largely reserves it for his depiction of Jesus as the obedient son who suffers to fulfill his saving task.<sup>63</sup> As a result, most Lucan references or allusions to the title "Son of God" appear in the passion and resurrection narratives, where Jesus continues as the Suffering Servant who, although the Son of God, paradoxically goes to the cross to die.<sup>64</sup> This paradox tightly connects Luke's presentation of Jesus to an atonement or sacrificial Christology, underscoring that the work of this chosen Son of God was to suffer and die for his people.

During his hearing before the Jewish authorities, Mark, the earliest account, has Caiaphas ask Jesus, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61), using a respectful circumlocution for the divine name. Like Matthew, Luke has Caiaphas ask whether he was the Son of God, but unlike Matthew, who combines it with a question about whether he was the Christ, or the Messiah (Matthew 26:63), Luke makes it a separate question, "Art thou then the Son of God?" (Luke 22:70). Yet Jesus's status as God's beloved Son in Luke is most patent in the close relationship between the two that the narrative portrays. In a unique Lucan passage at the Last Supper, Jesus speaks of the kingdom that "my Father hath appointed unto me" (22:29). While all four Gospels have Jesus pray intimately with God as his Father either right before or in the garden (Mark 14:35–36; Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:41–42; John 17:1–26), the received version of Luke is the only one that recounts how God sent an angel to strengthen him during agony that made his sweat "as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:43–44). While there are textual problems with these passages,<sup>65</sup> Restoration scripture confirms that



Jesus did indeed suffer to fulfill his mission, bringing glory to the Father (see Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:16–19).

Luke continues to have Jesus speak directly with God as his Father on the cross. Only in Luke does Jesus plead, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), and Luke paints a much more intimate, uninterrupted Father-Son relationship in his final moments. First, he omits any sense that he was abandoned by God (Mark 15:34; parallel Matthew 27:46). Second, by focusing on Jesus’s completing his mission (John 19:30) rather than ending with an anguished cry (Mark 15:37; parallel Matthew 27:50), in Luke Jesus’s final words are, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). With his death, Jesus’s mission as obedient Son and suffering servant is complete.

### **“Who died, heaven’s gate to open wide . . .”**

As in the other Gospels, Jesus completes his saving work by overcoming the grave, but Luke’s account of the resurrection is much richer in detail than the other Synoptics and is more effective in demonstrating the reality of an actual, bodily resurrection.<sup>66</sup> Although his resurrection narrative begins with the women at the empty tomb as do the other Synoptics, he universalizes the good news of Jesus’s rising by appearing first not to the gathered eleven but to two “average” disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32). As has been noted, it is here that Jesus uses the title “Christ” of himself for the first time, identifying his sufferings as God’s anointed servant as the source of his glory (24:26). Appearing to the eleven, he gives evidence of the reality of his rising, letting them handle him and see him eat. Helping them understand the scriptures, he then proclaims, “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (24:46), emphasizing that it was not just his death but also his resurrection that fulfilled his messianic mission. Indeed, though Luke affirmed Jesus’s divine Sonship through the Savior’s earthly ministry, both in his Gospel and in Acts, Luke’s emphasis on

the resurrection, his presence in heaven, and the promise of the Risen Lord's return represents an important exaltation Christology.<sup>67</sup>

Luke alone gives a secure account of Jesus's ascension into heaven (Luke 24:51), an account that he repeats in more detail in Acts 1:9.<sup>68</sup> The longer ending of Mark—probably composed later to complete the original ending or to replace one that was lost—likely draws upon Luke for its version of Jesus's ascension (Mark 16:19).<sup>69</sup> In Matthew, after Jesus appears to his disciples at a mountain in Galilee and gives them their apostolic commission, the Gospel ends with the words “and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). The Gospel of John, likely written after Luke, ends with Peter and the Beloved Disciple still with Jesus. Thus while these two Gospels leave us with the image of Jesus still present with his followers, only Luke presents him as the Risen Lord ascended into heaven, where he awaits those who will follow him. Luke then concludes his Gospel by writing, “And they *worshipped* him, and returned to Jerusalem *with great joy*: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:52–53; emphasis added). The image of people worshipping Jesus is unprecedented in the Gospel of Luke,<sup>70</sup> but the homage and great joy of the disciples here parallel the angelic praise of the promised Savior in the opening infancy narrative (Luke 2:10–14). Just as the windows of heaven were opened to welcome the birth of the newborn Son of God, they have opened again to receive him. Having opened those windows with his suffering and death, as Anna Bartlett Warner penned, they have remained open wide for all believers since.

ERIC D. HUNTSMAN *is a professor of ancient scripture and coordinator of the Ancient Near Eastern Studies Program at Brigham Young University.*

## Notes

1. I appreciate the research and proofing help of my long-time assistants Stephen Betts and Julia Min-tsu Chiou, which, as always, was invaluable.
2. Anna Bartlett Warner, "Jesus Loves Me," no. 68, in *Bradbury's Golden Shower of S.S. Melodies: A New Collection of Hymns and Tunes for the Sabbath School*, ed. Wm. B. Bradbury (New York: Ivison, Phinney, 1862), 67–98. See [https://hymnary.org/person/Warner\\_Anna](https://hymnary.org/person/Warner_Anna).
3. Patristic sources that identify "Luke" as the author of the Third Gospel include the Muratorian Canon (c. AD 170), Irenaeus (c. AD 130–c. 200; *Adversus Haereses* 3.1.1; 14.1–3); Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215; *Stromata* 5:12); and Tertullian (c. AD 155–c. 240; *Adversus Marcionem* 4.2.1–5). See the discussion of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, Anchor Bible 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 35–41; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 33–35; S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 72–76.
4. Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 63–87; Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 30–31. For other approaches to the sayings source, including the possible priority of Luke over Matthew, see Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2000), 169–207; and Brown, *Testimony of Luke*, 52–61.
5. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, Anchor Bible 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), xlvi–xlvi; Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 87–89; Mark A. Matson, *In Dialogue with Another Gospel? The Influence of the Fourth Gospel on the Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Luke* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 6–10, 155–63, 263–438.
6. Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 41–47, 57–59, 113–25; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 13–14, 51–58, and *passim*; Brown, *Testimony of Luke*, 3–7, 32–34.
7. Robert F. O'Toole, *Luke's Presentation of Jesus: A Christology*, *Studia Biblica* 25 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2008), 1–2.

8. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 120–21.
9. Brown, *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 129–33; H. Douglas Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke's Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23–24.
10. Raymond A. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (1977; repr., New York: Doubleday, 1993), 33–37.
11. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 242–43; Eric D. Huntsman, *Good Tidings of Great Joy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 41, 142.
12. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 250–52; Huntsman, *Good Tidings of Great Joy*, 41.
13. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 31–32, 48–49, 239–40.
14. Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Christmas* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 38–39.
15. See 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 106:21; Isaiah 19:20; 43:3, 11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8; Jeremiah 14:8; Hosea 13:4; see Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 239–40.
16. Luke 1:47; 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Ephesians 5:23; Philippians 3:20; 2 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; 2 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 2 Peter 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; 1 John 4:14; Jude 1:25. In 1 Timothy, Titus, and Jude, however, the title is used of God, not Jesus Christ.
17. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, 242–43.
18. K. H. Schelke, “sōtēr,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 3:325–27. See Dominique Cuss, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament*, Paradosis 23 (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1974), 63–69; Stanley Porter, *Empire in the New Testament* (Eugene, OT: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 172; Pyung-Soo Seo, *Luke's Jesus in the Roman Empire and the Emperor in the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2015), 116–18.
19. Priene Calendar Inscription, *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* 458; emphasis added; see Craig A. Evans, “Mark's Incipit and the Priene

- Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000): 67–81.
20. Luke 6:9; 7:50; 8:12, 48; 9:24, 56; 23:23; 17:19; 18:26, 42; 19:10; 23:35, 37, 39.
  21. O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 58, 66–69.
  22. Luke 3:6; 19:9.
  23. O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 11–12.
  24. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, 13–16, 23–38.
  25. Luke mentions that Jesus is from Nazareth more than any other Gospel, emphasizing his humanity and the reality of his upbringing (Luke 1:26; 2:4, 39, 51; 4:16, 34; 24:19); see O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 8–9.
  26. Stanley E. Porter, “The Messiah in Luke and Acts: Forgiveness of the Captives,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 150–51; O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 29–33, 42–44, 118–19.
  27. While the Masoretic Hebrew text of Isaiah 61:1, which was the basis of the King James Version translation, makes no reference to giving sight to the blind, the Greek Septuagint version of this Isaiah passage explicitly reads *kai typhlois anablepsin*, which is translated as “recovery of sight to the blind.”
  28. Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 181; O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 56.
  29. F. Hahn, “christos,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 478–82; see Porter, “The Messiah in Luke and Acts,” 151–53; O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 118–20.
  30. *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 1–12.
  31. Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 197–99; for the count used here, see Appendix, pp. 392, 395–97.
  32. O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 95, 110–12.
  33. O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 111.
  34. Brown, *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 89–91; Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 210, argues that it is actually a narrative insertion by the evangelists in Matthew 9:6 and Luke 5:24. For my count, see “Son of

- Man” in the appendix. Outside of the Gospels, it occurs in the martyrdom speech of Stephen in Acts 7:56, in a quotation of Psalm 8:4 in Hebrews 2:6, and in visions of the apocalyptic Jesus in Revelation 1:13 and 14:14.
35. Brown, *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 91–100; Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, 268–71.
  36. Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, 266–68; O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 141–53.
  37. Eric D. Huntsman, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 41–63.
  38. Fiona Givens and Terryl Givens, *The Christ Who Heals: How God Restored the Truth That Saves Us* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 64–65.
  39. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, 24.
  40. Huntsman, *Miracles of Jesus*, 66.
  41. Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 175–77.
  42. K. Kertelge, “lytron/6. lytrōtēs,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:366.
  43. Job 19:25; Psalms 19:14; 78:35; Proverbs 23:11; Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16; Jeremiah 50:34.
  44. For my figures, see “Lord” in the appendix, where the Lucan figures compare strikingly to the forty-eight occurrences in Matthew, nineteen in Mark, and forty-three in John. In addition to eighty-three clear uses in regard to Jesus in Luke, *kyrios* appears an additional twenty times in a more mundane sense not in relation to Jesus. For a discussion of the significance of the Lucan usage, see J. A. Fitzmyer, “kyrios,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 328–31; see Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 200–201; Thomas P. Rausch, *Who Is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier Books, 2003), 136; C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 232–33.
  45. Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, 243–44; Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 210–16.
  46. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, 197–98.

47. Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 202–4; Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 10. See the appendix, where I have identified thirteen instances of Luke as a post-Easter narrator referring to Jesus as “Lord.” Contra Fitzmyer and Rowe, there are also four instances where John does likewise.
48. Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, 247–48.
49. Luke 1:6, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 25, 28, 32, 38, 43, 45, 46, 58, 66, 68, 76; 2:9 (2x), 15, 22, 23 (2x), 24, 26, 29, 38, 39; 3:4; 4:8, 12, 18, 19; 5:17; 10:2, 27, 41; 12:37; 13:35; 19:38; 20:37, 42.
50. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 4, 34–39, 382–83. For earlier LDS uses of the title, however, see Boyd Kirkland, “Elohim and Jehovah in Mormonism and the Bible,” *Dialogue* 19 (1986): 77–93; and Ryan Conrad Davis and Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Usage of the Title Elohim,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 1 (2013): 109–27.
51. F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 338–39.
52. Most commonly *hesed* in the Old Testament is translated as “mercy,” “compassion,” or “pity” in the Septuagint, all with the Greek term *eleos*; see Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 193; F. Staudinger, “*eleeō*,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:429–31.
53. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 65; Huntsman, *Miracles of Jesus*, 45 and 148n9.
54. O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 25–26.
55. O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 26–27.
56. See Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, 281.
57. Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 65, 68–69.
58. Often this figure is thought to be good king Hezekiah, though this suggestion presents certain chronological difficulties. See John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, The International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 244–48.

59. The later Byzantine texts, upon which the KJV was based, read Son. Earlier manuscripts, however, had *eudokias* rather than *eudokia*, yielding “and on earth peace to men of good will.” See Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 111, and Huntsman, *Good Tidings of Great Joy*, 83.
60. Cuss, *Imperial Cult*, 71–74.
61. O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 178.
62. Rausch, *Who Is Jesus?*, 135; Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, 281; O’Toole, *Luke’s Presentation of Jesus*, 155–56.
63. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, 277–78.
64. Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, 281–82.
65. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 151. See Lincoln M. Blumell, “Luke 22:43–44: An Anti-Docetic Interpolation or an Apologetic Omission?,” *Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 19 (2014): 1–35.
66. Buckwalter, *Character and Purpose of Luke’s Christology*, 101, 113–14, 118.
67. Rausch, *Who Is Jesus?*, 129–30, 137.
68. For a discussion of whether this is a doublet of the ascent in Acts or an “interim ascent,” see Brown, *Testimony of Luke*, 1141.
69. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 102–6.
70. Marshall, *Gospel according to Luke*, 910.