

## Homily for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany – 2022

With the first four verses of the Gospel According to St Luke forming the opening portion of today's gospel it is perhaps timely to spend a little time looking at the man known as Luke the Physician and his writings in the New Testament.

There is very little doubt that the same person is the author of both St Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. This is clear from the opening paragraphs of each book and just as clear from the literary style of both books. They are written by a capable Greek scholar. Together, St Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles make up the largest contribution of any one individual to the New Testament, something like 27% of the entire NT text.

Luke is mentioned 3 times by St Paul as his companion in his epistles and, with each mention made by St Paul, it is significant that Mark, the nephew of Barnabas the Apostle, and the man who is the author of St Mark's gospel, is also present. Clearly Mark and Luke knew each other well and both travelled with St Paul on some of his missionary journeys. It is also perfectly evident from the text of St Luke's gospel that he knew of, and had access to, St Mark's gospel when he wrote his own account of the life of Jesus Christ.

In three sections of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke writes in the first person plural speaking about 'we' and 'us.' For example in Chapters 27 and 28 Luke vividly describes the dramatic sea journey from Caesarea to Rome with the terrifying shipwreck at Malta and the subsequent journey from Malta to Syracuse in Sicily and finally to Rome. In all of this journey, Luke writes in the first person. It is quite clear he was on board the ship and a companion of Paul at the time.

It is St Paul in his letter to the Colossians who describes Luke as '*the beloved Physician*' so it is known Luke was a Doctor and it is also St Paul, again in the letter to the Colossians ... who makes it clear that Luke was not a Jew (see Colossians 4:14) although it is perfectly evident that Luke had a thorough knowledge of Jewish life and culture of the time and a commanding knowledge of the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint.

Of particular interest is Luke's reason for writing his gospel... *"I, too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account....so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."* Luke's stated intention to write an orderly and factual account of the life of Jesus Christ has also earned him the name 'Luke the historian.'

In both the Gospel and in Acts, Luke mentions people, places, times and events external to the story he is telling. Where other remains from the ancient world survive... overwhelmingly, they confirm the places, people times and dates he mentions. To give a just a few examples:

Felix and Festus (see Acts CH 25 and 26) were the successive governors of the province of Judea from 52-59 AD and 59 62AD respectively.

The emperor Claudius did indeed expel the Jews from Rome as stated by Luke in Acts Ch 18.

There was a severe famine during the reign of the Emperor Claudius. (see Acts 11:28) The Nile rose to unprecedented heights causing a drastic reduction in the crop yield in Egypt at this time.

Turning to the gospel, Luke places the proclamation of John the Baptist into its historical context (see Luke 3:1) as being in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar as Emperor, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was ruler of Galilee, his brother Philip ruler of Trachonitis, Lysanius was ruler of Abilene and when Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests of the temple at Jerusalem. Now the fifteenth year of Tiberias' reign was AD 28. Pilate was the governor of Judea then. Herod was ruler of Galilee. Philip was ruler of Trachonitis and Lysanius was ruler of Abilene. Caiaphas was High priest and his father-in-law, Annas, who had been high priest until he was deposed in 15 AD, was still living and wielding power through his son-in-law. It all adds up.

Time does not permit more in the way of demonstration of Luke's credentials as a historian. Hear what the great archaeologist, author and historian, Sir William Ramsay, says... *"Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...he should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."*

Dear faithful people there is so much more that could be said about St Luke. However, on a hot morning it is better to be brief. Let this little outline of the man and his writing remind you of two things though.

1. Do not let friends, acquaintances, family members get away with saying that everything written about Jesus Christ is fable and legend and that he never even existed. That is a bare faced lie and it must always be countered when ever you come across it.

2. If you still are not a regular Bible reader, remember the words of St Jerome, the greatest ever Bible translator, because they apply to you. He was not a man to mince words and he famously said. *“Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Jesus Christ.”* Now is the perfect time to become a Bible reader. The best place to start is with St Luke’s gospel and follow on with the Acts of the Apostles.