

Letters to “Luke”

Dear Theophilus,

I’m sending you this follow up letter because I’d love to know what you thought of the literary “ordered account” that you received in the Gospel of Luke. By the way, was it a scroll? Or did someone read it to you?

Was your faith in Jesus strengthened, as the writer intended? Did you experience this account as good news?

I’d also like to know who you were. I was curious to learn that your name, means friend of God, or beloved of God. That is actually one of my favourite ways to think of people these days, beloved of God.

Since your days on earth -- if you really are an actual person, and not just literary device – some followers of Christ seem to have forgotten that they are beloved by God. It’s rather sad, really. We concentrated on sin a little too much for a few centuries there. When in fact, love is the whole point of the story, isn’t it? “God so loved the world.”

And so whenever I can I like to remind us that whoever we are, whatever we believe, we are loved by God. Just like you, Theophilus.

Yours sincerely,

A fellow hearer of the gospel

Dear writer of Luke and Acts,

I’m writing you this letter to express my deep appreciation for all the effort you put into organizing the stories you included in your account to Theophilus. It must have been a difficult, yet rewarding task. Writing often is.

I’m sorry I can’t address you by name, because, well, we don’t actually know who you are. Some scholars these days even speculate that you may have been a woman, because of how you lift up women’s experiences in what we call the Gospel of Luke! That would be so cool, but there’s no way of knowing for sure.

Next time, maybe just sign off and save us all the trouble. By the way, by today’s standards it would not have been OK for you to copy large portions of the gospel of Mark. We consider that plagiarism, even though in your times it was not.

I'm not sure what Theophilus made of these stories, but you should know that they have endured for centuries, and they have indeed instructed us in our faith. We look at this first story at least once a year when we celebrate something we like to call Christmas.

This morning at our church – that's what groups of Jesus followers came to be called. It's way more complicated than that but I don't have time to explain Judeo-Christian culture in this simple letter.

Anyway, this morning at our church worship service we heard the first chapter you wrote and we marveled again at how you connected all the dots so beautifully for us.

I really appreciated the way you lifted up the stories of these two women, Elizabeth and Mary. Overall I would have liked a few more details, but I do appreciate that you put songs into their mouths, instead of the men's, and that you showed they had a relationship with each other.

I also liked that you didn't feel a need to cast Zachariah only in a positive light. A bit of humour there, with him losing his voice and all. Nice touch.

It is true that sometimes it's hard to see God's imprint in our lives as we're living them. But in hindsight, when set in an ordered account – our a journal, or a sharing time – we can perceive clear patterns of God's grace and mercy in our lives. We share your approach of connecting the dots and naming God at work among us. We also share your love of songs!

With gratitude,

A fellow storyteller

Dear Zachariah,

Just a quick note to say: Thanks for being a part of this story and for your humanity in being a bit skeptical of the angel's promises. I don't blame you, coming and terrifying you out of the blue like that. Having faith isn't easy, is it?

Thank you as well for supporting your wife Elizabeth, and for having her back when everyone was trying to tell her that she had to follow tradition in naming the baby. What a great example you are to anyone who tries to do things differently, especially in religious leadership. Also an example to men who live in partnership rather than in competition with their wives.

I do wonder whether you ever had any doubts about things when your son John was out ranting in the desert, wearing fur, and eating locusts and calling on everyone to

repent. He didn't turn out particularly priestly, did he? Didn't follow in your footsteps. Did you ever wonder later if you had only imagined the whole thing? Did you ever doubt that God was even involved?

Well, giving up a position of power is not easy, letting your son follow his own path took humility on your part.

I'm glad you got your voice back.

Sincerely,

A fellow skeptic and laryngitis sufferer

Dear Elizabeth,

You don't know me, but I wanted to send you this Christmas letter – one of the few I've managed to send off this year. First of all, as an older woman, let me express my admiration for you taking on a pregnancy and raising a child late in life. It can't have been easy physically or logistically, but you did it and raised a prophet, no less! The angel was right, the record shows John the Baptist did have a powerful ministry – though he did have strange tastes in clothing and eating habits, as I mentioned to your husband Zachariah.

As someone who also had many difficulties around pregnancy and infant loss, I want to tell you that I recognize why you went into seclusion for five months. Perhaps you had had a few miscarriages in your day. You had to be sure, right? I get it.

Here's another thing, I can't imagine what your life would have been like before you had that baby, living under a cloud of shame in your community.

It's actually impossible to live up to people's expectations – but of course, you figured that out the hard way. How unfair it is to shame a woman for not having children. We'd like to believe that nowadays we don't do that anymore, but I'm not so sure. We still find so many ways to shame women, but I don't want to spoil your Christmas letter by listing it all here.

Shame is such a burden, isn't it? I'm so glad God helped you to overcome it, Elizabeth. I'm proud that you figured out that God is in the business of removing shame for all of us. I wish we could all figure that out and really live into it.

Elizabeth, if God could do this in your situation, maybe God can remove our shame as well.

With hope,

Dear Theotokos, “God-bearer”, dear Mary,

What can I say to you that hasn’t already been said? You predicted that after these events in your life everyone would call you blessed, and that is exactly what happened.

I’m sure that by now you’re aware that many people to this day even worship you and pray to you. They find in you, Mary an element of the Divine feminine that they were craving, having mostly male images of God being stressed over and over. We crave an image of God with a mother’s heart.

What was it really like for you, Mary? We like to imagine you as a young woman who quickly took the risk of being an unwed mother in a culture that could have killed you for that. Did you really accept and understand the magnitude of your unborn child? Was your acceptance really that quick or did the angel Gabriel have to make several trips to explain things to you?

I want you to know that, even all these centuries later, we *have* experienced Jesus as truth and life for us. We *have* come to know him as an expression of God’s love for the world. So, thank you for following your faith and your heart.

As Jesus’ followers, today we sang your song of triumph again, your *Magnificat*. We’re still collaborating with God to try to turn things upside down in our world. In the realm of pregnancy, when the fetus turns upside down, that means it’s getting ready to be born. So we keep on dreaming your dream of a new world wanting to emerge.

Thank you for saying yes to God, for raising Jesus so well, for mothering him his whole life. And for giving us the example of pondering in our hearts, even when our heads don’t understand how it all works out.

You did bear the Light of the world, Mary. May God’s love so grow in us.

Love,

A group of your son’s disciples