

Title: Here's the BLUF: Certainty
Text: Luke 1.1-4
Theme: "that you may have certainty"
Series: Luke #1
Prop Stmt: God has come and has made his coming known so that we could have certainty in this life and the next.

Luke 1.1-4

A few weeks back I wrote a Wednesday blog to you all on epistemology, which is the theory of knowledge or the study of how or why you can know things. If you start with the bottom rung of the knowledge ladder. Everybody is a believer. Everybody believes something. Even the people who claim that you cannot know anything with certainty are stating that with certainty. Right? They are certain that you cannot know anything with certainty. So, everyone is a believer. But, we do not all believe the same things, obviously. There is more than a little disagreement about which college football team is the best, or more honest.

But here is the issue in a nutshell. If you are a human, you are a believer. How do you know if what you believe is right and true? And related to that is a harder question. Are you willing to examine what you believe? Just because you think something is true, does not make it true. Just because you were raised with certain ideas, beliefs, traditions, religious and philosophical concepts, does not make them true. But what you believe matters. What you believe has a direct bearing upon your life now and forever. So, what do you believe about life? What do you believe about who you are? What do you believe about where you came from? What do you believe about why our world is so broken? Do you believe it can be fixed? If so, how? What do you believe happens after you die? Are you certain? Are you willing to have your beliefs questioned? If what you believe is really true, then wouldn't you be willing to re-examine them? If what you believe is really true, then you don't need to hold onto this belief, blindly.

It should be obvious, that I want you to know Christ, love Christ and follow Christ. I want you to have life in Christ, but you have to come to that understanding and conviction on your own. I cannot make you believe and don't want to. I cannot manipulate you, cajole you, threaten you or anything of the sort. What I can do, and must do, is lay out for you the case for following Christ on his terms, his way and our study of Luke's gospel is for that and I am going to be pressing you on this point, and along the way I will be pointing out some really obvious things such as: Christ is knowable. He is easy to love (unless you love yourself too much). He is worth following. No one else can give you life forever. No one else is worth believing in like him. Look at how approachable he is. He doesn't hide from us and make it difficult to be found. He has come to us. He has come to us and for us. He invites us to investigate and listen that we might be convinced and that we might believe and love him.

Most religions are not like that. There is no freedom of thought. There is no invitation for investigation. Why not? There are people who supposedly have secrets, whose knowledge of those secrets give them power to hold sway over others. You see that in the hierarchy of the

Mormon religion, you see it the culture of Jehovah's Witnesses and so many others. There is a façade of appeal. You are drawn in, and then you can't get out. It's like an abusive relationship that is full of fear. Biblical Christianity is so different. Christ is not power-hungry. He has all power and he seeks to share it. He is not threatened and cannot be dethroned. He is God. He cannot be proven wrong, he is truth. Therefore, his life was an open invitation to come and see. Come and be with him. Come and listen. Come and investigate. Come and learn. Come and believe. Come and follow. Come and have life. I have been a follower of Christ for over 55 years. For more than 40 of those years I have been a pastor and for 34 years, your pastor. That means that week after week I stand before people and I teach and explain the Bible. I don't do it because it is my job. There are easier careers. I do it because it is my love and absolute conviction. I preach with conviction and certainty because I am convinced and certain of these truths. I am not too sure about me, but I am absolutely certain about God. And that certainty in God and love for God motivates me to teach you the Bible, so that you will, by God's grace become certain of God and love God and trust Christ. This is why I have anticipated this series in Luke's gospel SO much. Luke introduces his gospel account by telling us, in one beautiful sentence why he has devoted so much of his life to writing this book. And, the BLUF, the bottom-line up front is this: (v.4) you can have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

1. **You can be Certain!** (v.4) – *that you may have certainty*

What is that worth? Certainty is very valuable. Cathi and I recently celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. I have, admittedly, not been the best husband when it comes to planning and scheduling special things for birthdays and anniversaries. Cathi has learned, not to get her hopes up too high. On her birthday, during the first year we were married, I was on a camping trip with some boys in my youth group. For our 19th wedding anniversary, I took her to a pastor's conference. That was not one of my better moves, but it was a good conference. For our 20th, I took her to Kenya because I was speaking at a missionary conference. I was so tardy in planning for our 25th, that we ended up going to a Bed and Breakfast in Oscoda for a night and couldn't hardly find a place open for dinner. So, I have a big hole to climb out of and I know it. So, for our 40th, I needed to come through and I wanted to. So, I scheduled a trip to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. I started planning this about 1.5 years ago. That is a long time to anticipate a trip. I wanted this to go well and I tried to anticipate everything I could including currency exchange, travel to and from the airport to the place we were staying. I thought I had this down. We were scheduled to arrive in Cabo, on Oct. 21. Perfect! Our anniversary is the 22nd. On the very day, that we were to arrive in Cabo, something else arrived in Cabo. A hurricane! Seriously, hurricane Norma made a direct hit on Cabo on that day. Our flights were initially rerouted and then cancelled and we were stranded in the airport in Mexico City and my knowledge of Spanish is limited to burrito, taco, nacho and chimichanga. I felt so helpless. I had no control, no say, no solution for this and what I/we had hoped for, was falling apart in front of me. I did not know where we were going to go or what we were going to do and I did not know who could help.

The day is coming for every single one of you, when you will die. You will come to the end of your life. Let's go to that time and let's back up the clock 2 minutes. Let's say that in 2 minutes

(120 seconds), your heart is going to quit, you die and you go into eternity. Here is one thing that is certain. That moment is coming for you. This will happen to you. When that happens, do you want to be like me in the airport in Mexico City? Lost, helpless, desperate, and completely at a loss? You don't have to be like that? That is what Luke is saying. You may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. And those things that you have been taught deal with the most important and eternal issues in all of life.

I called the airline and asked what I could do. They told me to who to look for. I found that person and they said, "come with me, I can help you." That is what Luke has done for us. Look at verse 4. "*that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.*" He has written this gospel account so that you can live your life AND come to the end with certainty. My role is that of a tour guide through Luke. I want you see what is here so that your faith in Christ is made certain so that your love for him flourishes and so that your soul is secure. What is it that contributes to this certainty? Luke gives us 5 reasons.

2. **Because the faith is biblically historical.** (1) – *a narrative of the things that have been accomplished*

Having completed our study of 1 and 2 Samuel, we can appreciate what Luke is saying. The stories and accounts of the life of Christ are more than just biographical details. Everything about his life is the fulfillment of promises that were made in the OT. Christ accomplished what God had planned out back then. Luke will point these out. The life and ministry of Christ was predicted in detail and his life fulfilled and accomplished those predictions.

God spent thousands of years building the stage for this event. He posted billboards all through history telling people about what was going to happen. He sent prophets to predict the setting, the timing, the nature and the reason for the coming of Christ. These prophets who represented God and spoke for God, were a picture of the Word of God that would become incarnate. Jesus, was the Word of God and God, who spoke to us. God arranged for thousands of priests to offer sacrifices and teach laws for hundreds of years that pointed to our need of Christ. Then Christ came as the perfect priest who offered up the perfect sacrifice when he offered up himself. That sacrifice ended the need for all sacrifices. For hundreds of years, God orchestrated the line of kings from David onward so that Christ would come and fulfill the longing in our hearts to have a perfect king who would love us, defend us, provide for us and never leave us or let us down.

In the coming weeks we are going to see how God promised and fulfilled that promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth, then Mary and Joseph, then shepherds, and then Simeon. All of that serves to elevate the significance of what Luke is writing about. This is huge! Even from a literary standpoint, this prologue by Luke is one of the finest examples of writing that we have from ancient Greek. The point is clear. Your faith in Christ, is well placed because God carried out what God planned to do and said that he was going to do. Your faith is certain...

3. **Because the faith is observable.** (1b-2) – *accomplished among us ...eyewitnesses*

Luke writes about the life of Christ because he investigated the life of Christ. He talked with people who were there. He heard firsthand from the people. They were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. The eyewitnesses were so convinced of what they saw, that they became the ministers (or servants) of the word. What they saw and heard captured them and changed their lives. But it was not from fear, but from conviction and love. These eyewitnesses were believers. Luke is not basing his accounts on hearsay. He knows the people. He knows the quality of their lives. He knows their character. He knows if they are believable. We all know people who will say whatever they have to say in order to get by. We all know people who say what you want them to say because they want you to like them. But, when watch someone for years and you know their integrity and you know that they can be trusted and this person tells you something, you know that you can believe it.

That is why it is both ignorant and arrogant to dismiss the Bible as being stuff of legends and made up by people who came up with fanciful stories over time. Look at the research methods that Luke employed. He talked with eyewitnesses and these eyewitnesses were so convinced of the reality of what they saw and the truthfulness of what Christ taught that they dedicated their lives to making Christ known. Again, that raises this to a different level than any other religion.

Take for example, the claim by Joseph Smith that an angel named Moroni appeared to him and was the guardian of the golden plates which were unearthed by Smith. These plates were supposedly written in reformed Egyptian that when translated into English became the source of the Book of Mormon. There is no such thing as “reformed Egyptian.” No linguist has ever heard of this nor are there any examples of it. There are also no golden plates. I was talking with a couple of Mormons one day and asked them about that. Have you ever seen the golden plates? They admitted they hadn’t. But you can’t ask those questions in the Mormon church without getting branded.

The Islam religion is known for its confident, demonstrative, and certain proclamations. Anyone who disagrees can put their life in danger. One of the stories of Islam is that the prophet Muhammed was miraculously transported to Jerusalem and then from there he went to heaven. That is why the Dome of the Rock, which sits on the site of the ancient Temple in Israel is such a big deal to Islam. But there is no historical evidence to support this claim. There were no eyewitnesses of Muhammed in Jerusalem. Compare that to the resurrection of Christ. Come, touch my hands. Come, touch my side. Do you see the difference. Belief is not forced upon you. That is the tone of this book, because that is the tone of Christ. Come, investigate, listen to me, and you will see. Our faith is observable. And another reason why we can be certain is

4. **Because the faith is reliable.** (3)

“having followed all things closely for some time past”

Paul calls Luke the beloved physician (Colossians 4.14). It was well known that Luke wrote this gospel and then the book of Acts. We are not surprised to find out that Luke was a doctor because of the level of detail that he writes with concerning these accounts, particularly the

ones where Christ heals people. His level of education is displayed by the quality of his writing. He wants you to know that you can believe what he writes about. This introduction makes it clear that Luke sees this account as worthy of being read by an educated audience who will take seriously what he is saying. Christianity is not only worth being in the conversation of the public square, but Christ is the point of history. This faith is reliable. That is why you can be certain.

1.5 is an example of this. Instead of saying, “hey there was this guy hanging around the temple one day” Luke tells us all sorts of historical data points so that we can know the preciseness of the event. In the days of Herod, king of Judea (there were several Herods), there was priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah.... Later on, in 2.1 “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.” Then again, 3.1. *“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah....”*

The point is clear. No one is making this stuff up. This happened. People saw it. It is historical. I am recording it because it is reliable. It is worth believing. And related to that...

5. **Because the faith is consistent.** (3b) *“to write an orderly account”*

Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein are two famous investigative journalists. I remember them from the Nixon days when they blew the lid on the Watergate scandal. They were dogged in their pursuit of what actually happened. That is Luke. He tracked down these accounts. He listened to the people who were there and then recorded the events in amazing detail. Then he put it all together in an orderly account. Luke notes in v.1 that many have undertaken to compile a narrative of these things. These events were well known, but Luke wants to dig deep and do the research so that all the details are known. This enables him to put together an orderly account because these events were orderly. There was a reason and logic to them. And beloved, that is so important for you to know.

Do you remember back during the Covid lockdowns when there were signs that people put in their yards that said “faith over fear.” I was not sure what they meant. If they meant that I am going to trust God no matter what and not live my life in fear, then, ok, I would be on board with that. If they meant, I am just going to pretend that Covid isn’t real that my faith protects me from getting sick, then I would not be on board with that. No, Covid was and is a real thing. Biblical faith is not a denial of reality. Biblical faith is based on truth. That is why the early church was so careful about they accepted as being Scripture. Their faith was rooted in truth and this truth was consistent and orderly. Propaganda is information that is biased or misleading in order to promote a particular cause of view point. Sadly, a lot of our “news” is propaganda. The early church was marked by people who were not promoting propaganda in order to amass power, influence or wealth. Actually, it was the opposite, they knew the truth. They witnessed

the truth. They wanted it recorded so that people like us would have the opportunity to know and therefore believe what they did.

6. **Because the faith is personal.** (3c) *“most excellent Theophilus”*

We don't know who Theophilus was. It's possible that there was a person with that name, but, it is likely that it was a nickname. Theo – God, philus – lover = lover of God. That may have been a person who was financially able to support Luke and paid for him to do this research. It is also possible that this was a term that Luke chose for every single person who loves God and will be well served by this careful account of the amazing life of Christ. He is worth studying because only by means of faith in him, can you have life. This account was written so that your faith would be certain. You can know.

We finally made it to Cabo San Lucas. The person in the airport who said, I can take care of you, did. And we made it. A couple of nights later, we were at a restaurant celebrating our anniversary. The staff came out with a special dessert that had a little flaming sparkler in it, they came to our table and clapped, and sang something that sounded festive, but it was in Spanish and it didn't have taco, burrito, nacho or chimichanga in it, so I wasn't sure. But, in that moment, it all came together.

Follow Luke. Look at these accounts. Come and see. Come and believe. There is a certainty that you can have that is the foundation for genuine faith. And this faith in Christ is the only means to eternal life, where the joy and celebration will never end.

Transition to communion