

## The Motif of Worship, Prayer, and Prophecy in Luke 1:5–25 as a Bridge between the Old Testament and the Gospel of Luke

Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5055-0551>

- Perez University College, School of Theology, Department of Biblical Studies, Winneba, Ghana
  - Faculty of Theology and Religion, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa
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### Abstract

*This article provides an exegetical contribution to the proposition by David E. Garland that the Old Testament period of the promise found fulfilment in the New Testament. The specific contribution of this study is the elements/traces of a bridge between the Old Testament and the annunciation/nativity narrative of Luke 1:5-25. The Gospel of Luke is characterised by people worshipping, praying, and fulfilling prophecy, as evidenced in the first two chapters of the book. There have been studies on the nativity narrative of the Gospel of Luke which usually took a historical comparative approach between the birth narrative of Jesus and that of John, and investigations into the uniqueness of the story to Luke. It leaves out the thematic discussion of some ethos of the annunciation narrative that seeks to provide an unflinching link to the Old Testament. This article examines worship, prayer, and prophecy in the annunciation and nativity narrative in Luke 1:5-25 to draw possible relationships to the Old Testament. The diachronic narrative-semantic method is used for the study. The findings are that the narrative alludes to Old Testament stories of worship, prayer, and fulfilment of prophecy and suggests a link or bridge between the Old and New Testaments.*

**Keywords:** John the Baptist; Fulfilment; Prayer; Prophecy; Luke 1:5–25; Worship

### Introduction

The annunciation/nativity narrative is critical to the introduction of the activities of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Luke. Roger Stronstad (2012:40) states that “...dramatic in this atmosphere of piety and cult, an unprecedented outburst of the charismatic activity of the Holy Spirit punctuates these nativity scenes.” Mark Allan Powell (2009:157–158) asserts that worship and prayer are some of the major themes discussed in the Gospel of Luke. In the opening and closing remarks of the book, people are seen worshipping and praying in the Temple (1:8; 24:53). One represents religious activity by priests in the Old Testament and the other by leaders of the early church – disciples of Jesus. The occasion that led to these activities can be considered to be the fulfilment of prophecy because the

selection of a priest to serve and the work of Jesus are fulfilments of earlier prophecies. Worship, prayer and prophecy are pursued by the author of the Gospel of Luke.

The themes of worship, prayer, and fulfilment run through Luke: Zachariah's prayer and answer (1:13); Simeon's prayer and answer concerning the Messiah which is a fulfilment of prophecy (2:22–28); Jesus prayed during His baptism (3:21); Jesus prayed before the selection of the twelve (6:12); Jesus encouraged perseverance in prayer (11:5–13); Jesus prayed on Mount Olives (22:39–46). The subject of prophecy and fulfilment is demonstrated in the conception of Mary (1:26–38); John the Baptist's messengers to Jesus (7:18–35); Jesus' death and resurrection (9:21–27, 43a–45); and Peter's denial of Jesus (22:31–38, 54–62). Powell (2009:158) sums it up to say that there are twenty references to people worshipping or praying/giving thanks to God in Luke's Gospel (1:46, 64; 2:13, 20, 18, 37; 4:15; 5:25, 26 etc). Consequently, the discussion of worship, prayer, and fulfilment of prophecy, and how it connects to some narratives in the Old Testament is very essential in the theology of Luke and is worth critical examination.

In view of the connectedness of Luke 1:5–25 (annunciation/nativity narrative) to the Old Testament, the diachronic narrative-semantic method<sup>1</sup> is used in this study, so that adequate references can be made to the Old Testament, and the Septuagint (LXX) effectively. The Gospel of Luke reflects Hebrew and Septuagintal vocabulary that describes worship activities through the Holy Spirit (Strongstad 2012:20). D. E. Garland (2011:59) supports the interconnectedness of the pericope when he avers that it forms a bridge between the Old Testament era of promise and a new era of fulfilment in the New Testament and that the sending of Gabriel is the unfolding of God's plan which began in the Old Testament. Whatever form/approach/model a hermeneutic process may take towards the interpretation of a text, a diachronic phenomenon is critical due to relative similarities that may exist among ancient texts (de Saussure 2013:521–540). Hence, a diachronic approach to textual interpretation is a linguistic approach to interpreting a text through time. Simply put, it takes cognizance of socio-historical analysis in the development and tradition of particular concepts through time.

According to W. Randolph Tate (2009:115), a diachronic approach is not “static but dynamic, open-ended, and always subject to modification, change, evaluation and rereading.” Geometrically, it can be argued that a diachronic method is a vertical relationship between ancient texts like the Bible. The weakness of the diachronic method in biblical hermeneutics is that it has the potential of not upholding the canon of scripture and hence constituting a canon within the canon because it tends to investigate various constituents of scripture. However, it allows for the study of the origin/history and development of the text/themes/concepts thereby appreciating its various levels of challenges and meaning at various epochs.

Subsequently, I adapt the exegetical procedure of Michael J. Gorman (2009): (i) translation, (ii) historical context, (iii) literary context/analysis, (iv) form, structure and movement, (v) detailed exegesis (analysis of text), (vi) synthesis (vii) theology/reflection, and (viii) Conclusion. The strength of this exegetical procedure lies in the fact that it offers a better flow of thought and conveniently facilitates the diachronic study of a text. Although it does not capture textual criticism as a subtitle, as suggested

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<sup>1</sup> An established system of seeking meaning through related linguistic expressions that have evolved through time (See Deo 2015).

by C. L. Blomberg and J. F. Markley (2010:1–36) in their exegetical procedure, it can be considered during the detailed exegesis. The component of translation asserted by the exegetical procedure of Gorman will not be observed in this study because I find the NRSV translation of Luke 1:5-25 satisfactory.

### **Scholarship on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments**

The relationship between the Old and the New Testament is a critical and complex field of study. The key arguments are continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments. One of the critical voices in the field is R. N. Longenecker (1999), who identifies three (3) main issues concerning the relationship between the Testaments. The first category he identifies is a deep-seated dichotomy between the two Testaments. The second group is the evenness between the Testaments, and the third is a theory of continuity between the Testaments. The first classification by Longenecker belongs to the discontinuity pole, while the second and the third fit the pole of continuity or relationship between the two Testaments. The pole of continuity is a Christian view concerning the two (2) Testaments.

The exploration of the relationship or bonding between the Old Testament and the New Testament has generally been well established and moves on to the study of themes in the Old Testament and its relationship/bridge with specific themes in the books of the New Testament.

Gregory Goswell (2013:459–474) focuses on the structural relationship and familiarity between the Old and New Testaments. He concludes that there is a macrostructural parallel correlation and reliance between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In other words, there is evidence to show that the structure of the New Testament demonstrates a relationship between the two. It implies the Christian appropriation of both Testaments as sacred scripture for the Christian faith.

Daniel O. McClellan (2019: 496) states that “the texts of the New Testament function not only to narrate the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and his earliest followers but also to renegotiate the relationship of those followers to their own ideological and scriptural heritage within the Jewish faith.” He specifically analysed the dynamic association between the Old Testament and the books of Matthew, John, Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation. For the Book of Acts, which is relevant to this study due to common authorship of Luke and Acts, McClellan (2019:504) argues that there are vocabulary and phraseological agreements and relationships between Stephen’s summary of Jewish history in Acts 7 and the quotation of Amos 9 in Acts 15 by James. This is to incorporate Christianity into the established history of the Jewish biblical narrative to indicate their close association. Therefore, the Old Testament (Septuagint) was considered a good ideological document that was suitable for the theological and missionary campaign strategy of the early church. However, McClellan's study of the relationship of the Old Testament and some books of the New Testament did not consider the Gospel of Luke, particularly, the thematic relationship in the nativity narrative of Luke 1:5–25.

Walter C. Kaiser Jr. (2008:45–101) concentrates attention on the authoritative use of the Old Testament by the authors of the New Testament. Engaging references of Old Testament prophecy passages in 1 Peter 1:10–12, 2 Peter 1:19–21, and John 11:49–52, Kaiser Jr. argues that the New Testament demonstrates the limitation of the human authors, a gap that has to be filled from the Old Testament prophecy so that the New

Testament can appeal to contemporary issues. It establishes respect and continuous relevance of the Old Testament to the New Testament context. The proposition of Kaiser Jr. suggests that the Old Testament would lack credibility without its use by the New Testament authors.

Peter Enns (2008:167–231) asserts that the many recitations and references to the Old Testament by New Testament authors demonstrate a Christotelic approach that attempts to understand that Christ is the ultimate goal of the Old Testament. He states that “the NT authors, by citing the OT, are eager to show how the person and work of Christ are a continuation, fulfilment, and climax of the Father's redemptive work that began in the early chapters of Genesis” (Enns 2008:167). It is a great joy for the New Testament authors to nurse Christotelic perspectives from the Old Testament. However, the question that this proposition raises is this: do the initial receptors of the Old Testament understand these passages from a Christotelic perspective? This is a herculean task.

Scholarship concerning the use of the Old Testament by the New Testament shows critical contributions to the resemblances of the macrostructure of the Old and New Testaments, the relationship of the Old Testament to some books in the New Testament, the use of the Old Testament by the New Testament for credibility, and Christotelic perspectives of the Old Testament by the New Testament authors. The contribution of this research to the relationship/bonding between the Old Testament and the New Testament is a specific study of the themes of worship, prayer, and prophecy in the nativity narrative of Luke 1:5–25 and how it forms a bridge and bonding to the Old Testament.

### **Some Interpretations of Luke 1:5–25**

Scholars have commented on and interpreted Luke 1:5–25 and arrived at varying conclusions informed by the method employed and the focus of their study. There are three main views on the text: (i) John the Baptist is the fulfilment of the prophecy of the second coming of Elijah in Malachi; (ii) the restoration of Israel to its former relationship with Yahweh; and (iii) supernatural/divine intervention in human affairs were myths presented as rhetorical parallel to Isaiah's call narrative.

#### ***John the Baptist as Fulfilment of the Prophecy of the Second Coming of Elijah***

Walker C. Kaiser Jr. (1982:221–233) explores the issue of whether John the Baptist is the fulfilment of the promised second coming of Elijah in Malachi 4:3–5. He argues that there are six significant mentions of Elijah in the synoptic Gospels coupled with the false reference to Jesus in the text, who was thought by some to be Elijah (Matt. 16:13–20; 17:10–13; Mk. 6:14–16; 8:27–30; 9:11–13; Lk.9:7–21). At the crucifixion, when Jesus is praying, the onlookers assert that he is calling Elijah to rescue Him (Matt. 27:45–49; Mk.15:33–36). These references indicate that the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the second coming of Elijah was extremely popular in the first century during the time of Jesus. Kaiser explains that the term “messenger” in the context of Malachi shows the earthly/physical coming of a prophet who will continue the work of Elijah, to prepare the way for the Messiah as King. He concludes that John the Baptist is the fulfilment of the second coming of Elijah and that he was not the only forerunner to the Messiah but that he was one of the forerunners in the series of forerunners in history. Hence, Luke

1:5–25 is part of a gamut of passages that seek to show that John the Baptist is the fulfilment of the second coming of Elijah.

### ***Restoration of Israel to its Former Relationship with Yahweh***

David Lyle Jeffrey (2012:21–25) suggests that whatever happened to Israel is in accordance with what God planned in history. Although Luke was a Gentile, he used Jewish narrative parallels to present the story of the birth of Jesus and John the Baptist. He traces the relationship that existed between ancient Israel and Yahweh, which the Israelites could not keep due to sin (Jer.2:2; 3:2,9; Hos.2:19–23). Using the meanings of Zachariah as “Yahweh has remembered again” and Gabriel as “power of God” or “emissary of God”, he argues that Yahweh has remembered Israel and sent His servant to restore Israel to her former relationship with Him. Jeffrey’s assertion is likely to have been informed by the restoratory task of John the Baptist as outlined by the angel (v.16, 17).

Similarly, Garland (2011:60–74) states that “remembering what God has done in the past in Scripture is a prerequisite for believing that God acts to fulfil promises in the present even in surprising ways.” He explains that what Yahweh promised in the Old Testament is what has been fulfilled. The prerequisite for fulfilment is knowledge of God’s word in history and faith that encourages hope amid anxiety. Garland’s view largely agrees with that of Jeffrey in the area of fulfilling prophecy or promise. However, he does not discuss the preparatory role of John the Baptist for the Messiah and the critical issue of whether he was the promised Elijah.

### ***Supernatural/Divine Intervention in Human Affairs were Myths and a Rhetorical Parallel to Isaiah’s Call Narratives***

Robin Gallaher Branch (2013:1–10) presented the story of Luke 1:5–25 in a literary drama from the perspective of Elizabeth to argue that Luke’s central idea concerning the infant narratives in Chapter 1 is drawn from a “female and gynocentric perspective.” He emphasises the joy that Elizabeth feels when she conceives and gives birth to John, who later becomes the Baptist. The drama is a story told from an African perspective of a woman in a polygamous marriage who has been seeking to conceive and has subsequently given up, and God later decides to answer her long-awaited desire. Her joy is uncontrollable. Branch’s work considers the African traditional means of telling stories and their impact on the audience. In view of the importance of a child for married couples in Africa, Branch makes the narrative an African story. He pursues the theme of joy and women in the Gospel of Luke. However, Elizabeth does not play any active role in the passage, nor is she an active character to be given such recognition.

Thomas L. Constable (2016:20–27) postulates that the angelic visit to Zachariah will easily communicate a message to a Greek audience whose members are familiar with Mercury and Zeus (Greek gods) that may appear in supernatural forms or even in the likeness of humans (Acts 14). According to Constable, supernatural visitation is God’s intervention in the affairs of humans and gives a clue that the child to be born is not an ordinary child. He explains that the supernatural visitation is caused by the prayer of Zachariah in the “Holy Place”. Constable emphasises the prayer aspect of the pericope and adds its resultant effect of supernatural visitation. However, he does not indicate the

relationship between the supernatural visitation and the anticipation of the second coming of the forerunner to the Messiah.

Kimberly M. Berkey (2013:47–62) contends that there are intentional rhetorical and literary similarities between Isaiah 6:1–8 and Luke 1:5–25. She clarifies that Luke connects the account of the prophecy concerning the birth of John the Baptist to the most cherished Jewish narratives of the birth of Samuel and Samson (1 Sam. 1:11; Judges 13:4–5), to probably show continuity and connectedness between the two Testaments. When it comes to the “temple setting, dynamic interaction with the altar” (Berkey 2013:52), the in-filling of the Holy Spirit at birth that points to John the Baptist as a prophet just like Isaiah, the theme of speech connects the two narratives. The exception is that Isaiah acknowledges his sin and is cleansed by one of the Seraphim so that he can speak whilst Zachariah expresses disbelief and is made dumb by the angel Gabriel. The narrative has several Old Testament allusions. Berkey’s study is limited to that of Isaiah’s call narrative with particular attention to the temple, which is one of the themes in Luke’s Gospel. She does not give attention to the prayer of Zachariah and the prophecy concerning the second coming of Elijah.

Some of the interpretations of Luke 1:5–25 have demonstrated connections with the Old Testament on different tangents. Kaiser links the text to the second coming of Elijah in the book of Malachi, Jeffrey links it to the restoration of Israel to Yahweh (Jer.2:2; 3:2,9; Hos.2:19-23), Garland connects it to the “prophecy and fulfilment” theory of the Old Testament, while Berkey draws similarities with Isaiah’s call narrative. Hence, drawing Old Testament inferences in the interpretation of Luke 1:5–25 is not novel. The contribution of this study to the enterprise is that the motifs of worship, prayer, and prophecy in Luke 1:5–25 run through the Gospel and indicate a strong bonding or bridge between the Old Testament and the Gospel of Luke.

### **Historical Context**

It is extremely important to understand the historical context of Luke 1:5-25 as a prerequisite for its interpretation. Luke 1:5-25 presents the temple setting for worship, prayer, and prophecy which are critical themes in the Gospel of Luke. It also provides the connection between the Old and New Testaments. Politically, the author located the narrative during the reign of Herod the Great of Judea who ruled between 37 BCE and 4BCE. It shows that Judea was under the rule of the Romans. Religiously, the priestly divisions and service at the temple as established by King David were in place. The temple and the priests still play an important role in the religious life of the biblical Jews. The role of the temple as a venue for worship and the priests as intermediaries between the people and Yahweh was indispensable.

### **Literary Context**

The literary aim of Luke can be deduced from the prologue (1:1–4), and this aim is to gather information from first-hand witnesses of the Jesus event as an alternative to existing Gospels, and to evoke faith in Jesus by the audience. Luke 1:5–25 belongs to the first main part of a block of literature that begins in 1:5-4:13 (Kummel 1975:125). Thomas R. Schreiner (1989:804–905) refers to this block of literature as preparation for the ministry of Jesus, which comprises the two birth prophecies (1:5–56); the birth of two sons (1:57–2:52); the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist (3:1–20); and the

reception of the Spirit by Jesus to begin His ministry (3:21-23). Schreiner's composition is so dense that it does not give attention to the song of Mary and Zachariah (1:46-56; 67-80) and the temple scenes (2:22-37; 41-52; 4:9) that form parts of the main themes of joy and worship in the temple in Luke's Gospel.

The pericope forms part of the annunciation of the conception narratives by the Gospel of Luke. This narrative is unique to Luke. It is not recorded by the other Gospels. Being unique to Luke, this narrative emphasises Luke's prologue of writing an orderly account, suggesting that after reading other accounts, the narrative of the conception of John the Baptist was left out. Hence, he included it in his Gospel. It is significant to mention that an orderly account does not mean a chronological and sequential listing of events, but a rhetorical (Schreiner 2014:14) and literary device/approach to communicate to his audience. The pericope was followed by a parallel narrative concerning the conception of Jesus by the same angel in a different setting.

### **Literary Analysis**

Constable (2016:5) suggests that Luke is a skilful literary communicator, as his engagement with Semitic and Septuagintal Greek shows his knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint. The pericope under review was chiasmically put together. Constable explicates that Luke employs chiasmus; a major structural stratagem used in ancient Palestine to indicate the cohesion of a narrative. Brad McCoy (2016:1-12) traces the history of chiasmus or chiasm to the period of the Sumero-Akkadian period and the Ugaritic text during the third millennium BCE. According to E. Assis (2002:273-304), "chiasmus is a rhetorical device that focuses the reader's attention on the center of the unit, where the central idea or turning point is situated. Awareness of chiasmus enables the reader to uncover the meaning of the literary unit." Chiasmus usually has two halves of a story with a central statement that distinguishes the two halves and at the same time shows the link between the two. The second half of the text is an inverted parallel of the first half (Berger 2014:1-31). Luke 1:5-25 presents a chiasmus:

A. Background of Zachariah and Elizabeth: they are a righteous couple who belong to a priestly family and yet had no child (vv.5-7).

B. Worship: Zachariah's ministry in the temple begins and people are praying outside (vv.8-10).

C. Supernatural encounter: Gabriel appears and fear grips Zachariah (11-12)

D. Prophecy: the birth of John the Baptist (v.13)

E. The task of John the Baptist (14-17)

D<sup>1</sup>. Zachariah's inquiry about the prophecy of the birth of John the Baptist (v.18)

C<sup>1</sup>. Gabriel introduces himself (vv.19-20)

B<sup>1</sup>. Zachariah delays in the temple while people pray outside, waiting for him to end the worship service (21-23)

A<sup>1</sup>. The new status of Zachariah and Elizabeth, Elizabeth conceives (vv.24-25).

The above chiasm structure shows four pair parallels of ABCDED<sup>1</sup>C<sup>1</sup>B<sup>1</sup>A<sup>1</sup> which has "E" at its climax or apex.

## **Form, Structure, and Movement**

The form of the pericope is a historical narrative. This is evident in the prologue, which has been attested to be a conventional historiographical prologue in the time of Luke (Garland 2011:51). It seeks to gather primary witnesses to give oral testimony concerning Jesus and His ministry. It is the most cherished, authentic, and acclaimed Hellenistic form of composing a narrative (Jeffrey 2012:7). It is structured in the same way as the Old Testament divine conception narratives (Gen.18; 25; 30; Judg. 13; 1 Sam.1–2):

- Appearance of an angel to the expectant couple
- Fear grips the couple
- Prophecy of the birth of a son
- Response by the expectant couple
- The name of the child
- Instructions for handling the child
- The destiny of the child

## **Exegetical Outline**

Exordium (vv. 5–7)

Zachariah's service in the temple, prayer and prophecy (vv.8–23)

Fulfilment of prophecy (vv. 24–25)

## **Detail Exegesis**

### ***Exordium (vv. 5-7)***

The author of the Gospel of Luke situates the conception of John the Baptist in the period when Herod was King of Judea. Judea simply refers to the land of the biblical Jews, which Luke sometimes uses to represent the entirety of Palestine (4:44). This is Herod the Great, who ruled between 37 and 4 BCE (Matt. 2:1–19) (Schreiner 1964:805). “Herod the Great was made King by the Roman senate in 40 BCE but his actual rule began in 37 BCE, he died in 4 BCE” (Craddock (2000:930). The period between 37 and 4BCE was an era of oppression of the biblical Jewish people under Roman rule (Ryken 2000:17). Herod was a ruthless King of the Judeans who managed to survive many plots against him and cunningly succeeded in pleasing his Roman superiors (Carter 2013:70). It is customary for Luke to link some important events to political history. Luke makes references to world history: the conception of John the Baptist occurs during the reign of Herod the Great (1:5); the birth of Jesus occurs during the period of the census by Emperor Augustus (2:1–2); and the proclamation of John occurs in the fifteenth year of Emperor Tiberius (3:1–2). This suggests that Luke wants to show points of reference for verification of his narratives for authentication by the audience.

Both Zachariah (KJV Zacharias) and Elizabeth belong to priestly stock. The priestly family of Levi was divided into 24 groups, of which Abijah was the eighth. When Israel returned from the Babylonian exile, some of the priestly groups were extinct but later reorganised into 24 group names by King David (2 Chro. 24:7–18; Neh. 12:1–7) (Schreiner 1968:805). This differs from the Levitical priests, who would usually serve for 25 years, possibly from age 25 to age 50 (Num. 8:24, 25). The reconstituted priesthood (Ezra/Nehemiah) found older priests like Zachariah still serving (Lk. 1:5–25).

Priestly duties under Ezra/Nehemiah were focused on the initial cultic and Torah teaching work of the Levitical priesthood, which added community leadership and influences of priests and Levites as critical agents of development (Fulton 2021). During the period of Zachariah, each group served for one week, twice a year, and during special occasions like festivals (Constable 2016:21). Elizabeth is generally mentioned to have been a descendant of Aaron, although the specific family of Aaron to which she belonged is not stated. Luke gives considerable attention to women in his Gospel, tracing the ancestry of Elizabeth to the first high priest of Israel, which is a great honour to women. The background of Zachariah and Elizabeth shows that they are a highly religious couple.

Zachariah and Elizabeth are δίκαιος (just, righteous, upright) in the sight of God. Δίκαιος is derived from δίκη (justice, punishment). In Greek mythology and religion, δίκη was considered the daughter of Zeus and assisted her mother in ruling the world of animals and humans, where she was responsible for justice and punishment (Verbrusse 2000:143). Δίκαιος is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew קָדַשׁ or קְדָשׁ (justice, righteous) which means righteousness based on the relationship between a superior and a subordinate where the subordinate is expected to obey the stipulations of the superior for the sake of keeping the relationship in order (Schrenk 1964:195). It also refers to the ethical and moral standard of God, which is later used to refer to the scriptures – The Hebrew Bible (Stigers 1980:725). In the LXX, the meaning of δίκαιος was widened to include the justice of God against the enemies of the people of God – salvation (Isa. 50:8), truth, mercy, and God’s faithfulness (Jer.50:7; Isa. 41:10; 42:10; 45:8; 51:5) (Schrenk 1964:195).

The presence of ἐντολαῖς (commandments), and δικαιώμα (regulation, requirement) shows that Luke is using a meaning that is related to קָדַשׁ or קְדָשׁ in the Old Testament. “Commandments and regulations reflect biblical expression (Gen. 26:5; Num. 36:13; Deut. 4:40; cf. 1 Kgs 8:61)” (Pao and Schnabel 2007:257). Being righteous strongly suggests blamelessness. The term δίκαιος is used in the opening chapter of Luke as an introduction to a theme which he later uses to (i) describe Simeon (2:25); (ii) the centurion uses it to refer to Jesus (23:47); (iii) to describe the deeds of Joseph of Arimathea (23:50–51) (Karris 1990:680).

Although Zachariah and Elizabeth were righteous, they had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and both were also advanced in age. Being childless was regarded as a reproach and embarrassment by biblical Jews (Gen. 30:23; Lk.1:25). Being righteous and yet childless suggests that their status before God is not commensurate to their status in marriage by prevailing cultural expectations at the time. However, Luke is drawing from the Old Testament righteous couples who later had children of outstanding achievement in society: Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:15-24); and Elkanah and Hannah (1 Sam.1:1–28).

### ***Zachariah Service in the Temple, Prayer, and Prophecy (vv.8–23)***

The number of priests in each cohort was so large that the decision of the one who would burn incense was determined by lot. Λαγχάνω (lot, chance) in the Old Testament and Classical Greek means getting something by coincidence, or something not based on one’s effort or prequalification (Verbrusse 2000:327). In the LXX, it is used as an example of how God chooses Saul and makes him King over Israel (1 Sam. 14:47).

Casting of lots was a common practice among the Ancient Near East (ANE) to determine the will of the gods in an important and binary matter. It was an established system of distributing inheritance among Assyrians and in Babylonian Mesopotamia because it was a myth among them that the universe was distributed by lot among the gods (Crone and Silverstein 2010:423–450).

Lot casting is practiced in the Old Testament but seldom in the New Testament. It is undertaken by first and foremost praying for the will of God to manifest itself, and then a coin is flipped or a dial cast or the names of candidates being written on a stone and rolled from an earthen jug. God promises Israel that he will make His will known through the casting of a lot (Josh. 14:1–5). Hence, the result of the casting of a lot can be equated to prophesy and fulfilment. The casting of lots was first practised by the high priest with the use of Urim and Thummim to distinguish between truth and falsehood in a matter (1 Sam. 14:41). Casting lots became dominant among the Israelites after the demise of Moses. This raises questions concerning the ministry of the prophets through whom God often speaks; the casting of lots was used as a replacement for the voice of God through the prophets. Although Zachariah was a priest and the high point of his service was to enter the “Holy Place”, being chosen by lot suggests that other priests could have been selected but God offered him a chance to serve.

According to the Talmud, “a priest who got to offer incense was deemed very fortunate, as that honor would surely bring him miraculous joy so that once a priest had received that honor, he was not to participate in that lottery again until every other priest had at least had a turn” (Basser 2000:826). This agrees with the LXX understanding of the casting of lots, which may have been popular among the audience of Luke because the LXX was the Bible of the Early Church before the canonisation of the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, there are several terms used for prayer; however, פלל and עתר (pray, intervene, call, request) are often used to refer to intercessional prayer (Hamilton 1980:726). The supplicant has the idea that he/she is addressing an all-powerful God who is providential (Brown 1976:862). Prayer characterised the relationship between Israel and God; the term prayer is sometimes substituted with “speak, call, cry out, groan, moan” (Verbrusse 2000:493). This suggests that prayer in the Old Testament directs and maintains one’s relationship with God. In the LXX, עתר and פלל are translated προσεύχουμαι (prayer) to generally mean supplication for a favour (Brown 1976:864). The New Testament προσεύχουμαι is generally used to refer to communication between a person and God through Jesus Christ; it is an open-ended communication concerning anything of interest to the supplicant (Verbrusse 2000:494). We can say that in the setting of a prayer by the laity (persons in the temple premises), Luke borrows the Old Testament understanding of prayer without neglecting the LXX meaning.

Ναός (temple, sanctuary) in this context refers to the “Holy Place”, not the entire temple or the “Holy of Holies” because the burning of incense takes place at the “Holy Place”. The priest assigned for the burning of incense was assisted by two other priests, who carried burning coals and followed the officiating priest into the “Holy Place”. Thereafter, they leave the “Holy Place” for the chosen priest to burn the incense (Garland 2011:65–66). Conversely, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 9:3–4) places the altar of incense in the “Holy of Holies”, which conflicts with historical facts and raises a lot of hermeneutical challenges. In view of the priestly Christological argument

advanced by the author, it is not likely that he/she was ignorant, but he/she probably used Exodus 40:5 to influence the composition. The passage suggests that the altar of incense should be placed after the “Ark of the Covenant”. Since the author does not specifically mention the placing of the altar of incense in the “Holy of Holies”, and the “Holy Place” precedes the “Holy of Holies”, it is plausible that the altar of incense is situated in the “Holy Place”. Consequently, Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translates θυμιατήριον in Hebrews 9:4 as *turibulum* (censer) rather than *altare* (altar). The KJV also follows the Vulgate translation of “censer”, which ultimately strengthens Luke’s description of the location of the altar of incense in the “Holy Place”.

The burning of the incense by Zachariah and the prayer of the congregation in the courtyard of the temple happen simultaneously. The offering of incense was instructed by God through Moses (Ex. 30:1–10). It is offered twice daily, in the morning and the evening. Due to the parallel nature of this session to Daniel 9 and the angel Gabriel appearing to Daniel during the evening sacrifice, it is plausible that it was the evening incense offering (Karris 1990:680) at about 3 pm (Acts 3:1). The offering of incense accompanied with prayer was an established theme in the Old Testament and rabbinic biblical Judaism (Ezra 9:5–15; Dan. 9:21; Judg. 9:1–14; Sir. 50:12–21) (Pao and Schnabel 2007:257). “Incense symbolized the ascending prayer of God’s people that rise like a sweet fragrance to Him (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4)” (Constable 2016:23). It is a prayer accompanied by dense, smoky perfume. The use of πλήθος (whole, multitude) to describe the people praying in the courtyard is Lukan hyperbole to indicate that a significant number of people were praying.

In Luke, significant things usually follow prayer (3:21–22; 6:12–16; 9:28–36; 22:39–46). Besides the narrative under study, there is no record in the Bible indicating the appearance of an angel(s) in the temple. However, rabbinic tradition shows that an angel can appear to the high priest in the “Holy of Holies” during the feast of *Yom Kippur* (Elgvin 2011:23–36). Scholars are divided on the phrases “an angel of the Lord” and “angel from God”. Constable observes that in the context of the pericope, it is an angel from God and not an angel of the Lord (Constable 2016:23). Unfortunately, he does not give reasons for his avowal and ignores the significance of the genitive κυρίου. Pao and Schnabel argue that in view of the appearances of angels in Genesis 16:7–13; Exodus 3:2–4; 14:19; 23:20; Numbers 20:16; Judges 6:11–22; Isaiah 63:9 and Hosea 12:4–5 who were often designated as representing God, the use of ἄγγελος κυρίου refers to God’s representative angel (Pao and Schnabel 2007:257). Their argument may be probable, but they base their argument on only the Old Testament appearances. The genitive κυρίου, the description of the angel that stands in the presence of God, and his capacity to punish Zachariah, which may not be part of the original message (vv. 19–20), strongly point to “the angel of the Lord”. The appearance of “the angel of the Lord” at the right side of the altar signifies a place of honour and favour, which suggests good news to Zachariah (Marshall 1978:55; Constable 2016:23). It is natural for humans to be unsettled by supernatural appearances because they are uncommon. Fear grips many who see angels in the Old and New Testaments (Ex. 15; Dan.9; Lk.1:28; 2:9).

Μὴ φοβοῦ (fear not) is usually the opening statement of angelic and supernatural appearances where the individual involved is terrified (Gen. 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; 35:17; 1 Sam. 4:20; Dan. 10:12, 19; Lk. 1:30; 2:10; Acts 18:9; 27:24). Δένσις (prayer, an entreaty, intercession) is mainly used for intercession on specific needs based on the

intercessor's relation with the God/deity (Greeven 1964:41). It is mainly Pauline language (Phil.1:4; 1 Tim. 2:1; 5:5), and Luke as a travelling companion of Paul borrows and uses it in Lk. 2:37; 5:33.

Was Zachariah offering a personal prayer or an intercessory prayer for Israel? The cultic context in which Zachariah finds himself suggests that he is interceding for Israel. The norm is that after the burning of the incense, the priest would prostrate himself to intercede for Israel (Garland 2011:66). Therefore, Zachariah was interceding for Israel because the evening prayer was dedicated to intercession for Israel; nonetheless, the answer to the prayer also answered a long-awaited personal prayer for conception (Marshall 1978:56; Garland 2011:66; Constable 2016:23). Since the couple were biblical Jews, the intercessory prayer of Zachariah for Israel included their long expectation for conception. The giving of the name by the angel suggests the uniqueness of the child in relation to the fulfilment of his destiny.

Joy (*χάρα*) is a theme Luke introduces in this pericope and develops in (2:10; 8:13; 10:17; 15:7, 10: 24:41). The Old Testament Hebrew for *χάρα* is *שמחה* (rejoice, glad, joyful), which means being wholeheartedly joyful (Waltke 1980:879) at the hearing of good news without any reservation. *χάρα* is the Old Testament equivalent for peace and salvation. It is usually used in the imperative mood. In the LXX, it is used to refer to the object of joy (Verbrusse 2000:599). In the New Testament, *χάρα* is the expression of religious piety, where adherents rejoice amid good news or during moments of suffering (Conzelmann 1982:367). In the context of the pericope, it can be argued that Luke's use of *χάρα* reflects the LXX meaning. The joy of having a son is not limited to the immediate family of Zachariah, but for the entire people of God – Israel. The naming of the child by the angel confirms that he is a covenant child just like Isaac (Gen. 17:19) (Pao and Schnabel 2007:257). Being great in the sight of the Lord “indicates God's choice and approval” (Constable 2016:24).

The restriction for John the Baptist not to drink wine or strong drink is ambiguous, whether he is supposed to be a Nazirite or to observe priestly regulations is not specified. A Nazirite is someone consecrated to the Lord as a result of a votary vow taken on his/her behalf. He/she is dedicated to religious service for a specific period or their entire life (Judg. 13:4ff; Num. 6:1–6). Nazirites are usually charismatic figures as a result of their dedication to God. In Numbers 6:1–6, the instructions concerning the Nazirite vow include the prohibition from liquor and anything relating to it, no trimming of hair, keeping long locks of hair, and not seeing a dead body. Similarly, priests were prohibited from drinking liquor and from touching/seeing a dead body (Lev. 10:8–9). From the descriptions given concerning the Nazirite vow and priestly regulations, it is obvious that the prohibition of John the Baptist concerning liquor belongs to priestly regulations.

However, Karris (1990:680) argues that John's abstinence from intoxicating beverages is an allusion to the Nazirite vow in Num. 6:3 and the Nazirite figures of Samuel and Samson. Karris may not have considered the entire regulation concerning Nazirite's vow. He might have been convinced by the prophecy that preceded his birth, which is analogous to the birth of Samuel and Samson. Further, the Masoretic Text (MT) does not state that Samuel was a Nazirite; it is the LXX that suggests that Samuel was a Nazirite (1 Sam. 1:11, 22 LXX in 4Q51). Karris does not clarify this. Pao and Schnabel (2007:258) support the view of Karris and attempt to justify it when they state that “the absence of the prohibition against the cutting of hair may be explained by the Lukan

emphasis on John as one who devotes entire life to the Lord”, not only his hair. The prohibition of liquor for John the Baptist shows that he is an ascetic prophet (Marshall 1978:57).

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is equivalent to being a prophet in the Old Testament. The prohibition of intoxicating liquor clearly shows that he will be filled/intoxicated with the Holy Spirit. It indicates the breaking forth of a prophetic agency from the long lacuna in the history of Israel’s prophetism. The presence of the Spirit in John the Baptist in his mother’s womb is the reason why he leaps in the womb when his mother meets Mary (1:44) (Jeffrey 2012:24). The Holy Spirit as a theme runs through Luke’s account (1:35, 40, 67; 2: 25-27; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12).

One of the tasks of John the Baptist is to turn many Israelites to God. Turning apostate Israelites to Yahweh is the duty of prophets in the Old Testament. Ἐπιστρέφω (to turn to, turn, return, turn around, be converted) is the Old Testament equivalent for שׁוּב (re) turn), it describes the responsibility of backslidden humans to return (Hamilton 1980:2340). It is turning from evil to return to Yahweh, a meaning also observed in the LXX (Verbrusse 2000:200). In the New Testament, ἐπιστρέφω has a secular and religious meaning: (i) to turn back (ii) conversion to the Christian faith (Verbrusse 2000:200). Since the Christian era had not yet been launched, Luke was probably referring to the Old Testament and the LXX meaning.

Gabriel appears to Daniel during the evening sacrifice to explain a vision (Dan. 8:15–16; 9:21–27). He is one of two angels mentioned by name in the Bible. The meaning of Gabriel (man of God) sums up that he is an angel with authority from God. Comparing the response of Zachariah and Mary to Gabriel, one may conclude that κατὰ τί (according to what?) by Zachariah implies that he will believe (the message) after the prophecy is fulfilled; πῶς (how?) by Mary (1:34) indicates faith in the prophecy of the angel as she was probing into how to fulfil the prophecy (Garland 2011:68). Zachariah’s doubt is analogous to that of Abraham upon the announcement of the conception of Isaac (Gen. 17:17) and the call narrative of Gideon (Judg. 6:11–27) (Jeffrey 2007:25). However, they are not punished by the angel. These precedents make it unclear why Zachariah was punished, which unfortunately serves as a sign despite its undesirability. Conversely, he is supposed to learn from the previous happenings to express faith in the prophecy of the angel. That notwithstanding, it can also be argued that Zachariah was not punished *per se*, but rather, Luke is drawing from the silence of Daniel when he tells of Zachariah’s encounter with Gabriel (Dan. 9:21–24; 10:15) (Karris 1990:680).

The praying congregants in the courtyard fear that since the "Holy Place" was close to the "Holy of Holies", something terrible might have happened to Zachariah as a result of sin (Dan. 10:15–17; Macc. 9:54–56) (Garland 2011:69). His silence makes the people believe that he is having a vision. The silence helps him not to spread doubts concerning the prophecy of the angel. He cannot pronounce the priestly blessing upon the people (Num. 6:24–26). However, he finishes his service and subsequently leaves for home.

### ***Fulfilment of Prophecy vv. 24–25***

The prophecy of Gabriel is in the process of being fulfilled in five months of the pregnancy of Elizabeth. This automatically indicates that the reproach of barrenness has been taken away, and her status is about to be changed to that of a mother. Five months

of seclusion suggests that she wants to safeguard the pregnancy and her health due to her advanced age (Constable 2016:26). This section indicates the space between the event in the temple and when it was made public. It calls for further examination of how Elizabeth got to hear the prophecy because Zachariah was speechless after the encounter with the angel in the temple but was able to speak during the naming ceremony of John the Baptist.

### **Synthesis**

According to Luke's evidence, the incident of this pericope takes place between 37 BCE and 4 BCE, during the regime of Herod the Great (v. 5). It takes place in a Jewish religious setting during the Tamid worship service, where the officiating priest goes to burn incense in the "Holy Place" and intercedes for Israel. He is expected to pronounce the Aaronic benediction upon the praying congregants in the courtyard. This incident is now narrated "as academic, technical or professional writings from the ancient world" (Gregory 2006:105), between 57CE and 59CE by a Gentile Christian physician (Col. 4:10-14) and travelling companion of Paul to a Gentile Christian(s)— Theophilus or beloved people of God who were likely Gentile Christians. This indicates that a Jewish story is being narrated to a Gentile Christian community. Hence, there is no emphasis on the Jewish elements of the Nazirite vow like keeping long hair and not seeing dead bodies.

The pericope serves as a bridge between the Old Testament and the Gospel of Luke. The cultic setting provides the opportunity for worship. The priestly background of Zachariah and Elizabeth, coupled with them being righteous in the presence of God, is not commensurate with their childlessness. This is to demonstrate that their childlessness was not due to sin but rather to glorify God's name. The appearance of Gabriel to Zachariah in the "Holy Place" was the first time in history when an angel appeared in the "Holy Place". One cannot be confident in saying that the release of Gabriel was prompted by the prayer of Zachariah or that of the congregation in the courtyard or God's sovereign intervention. The doubt of Zachariah cannot stop God from acting to fulfil His promise. Zachariah is silenced to make the prophecy/promise active. The prophecy of Gabriel has a dual fulfilment: (i) It fulfils the expectation of the eschatological Elijah and (ii) the long expectation of Zachariah and Elizabeth to conceive. The restoratory task of John the Baptist of turning some Israelites back to God is the assignment of many Old Testament prophets. It is obvious in the exegesis that the combination of worship, prayer, and faith in the prophecy of God will lead to the fulfilment of the need of a nation or individual. Theologically, the pericope gives credence to worship and prayer that the author of Luke expounds (Lk. 1:8; 24:53). It also alludes to the charismatic features of the Spirit expressed in Luke-Acts and the use of supernatural beings to intervene in the affairs of humans. However, these supernatural beings are not to be worshipped or prayed to.

The motifs of worship, prayer, and prophecy are critical themes that link the Old Testament to the Gospel of Luke. Although some scholars connect Luke 1:5–25 to specific narratives/pericopae or books in the Old Testament, it has been demonstrated in this study that the motifs of worship, prayer, and prophecy in Luke 1:5–25 show a close connection with the entire Old Testament, which provides a bridge between the two. If the author of Luke was a Jew, then it would have been due to his familiarity with the

Hebrew Bible. However, being a Gentile and writing to a Gentile suggests that he might have received information through research he claims to have conducted in order to write an orderly account (Lk. 1:1–4). An issue that stands out for further studies is the issue of a Gentile author writing a Gospel to a Gentile from a Jewish “point of view”.

## Conclusion

The themes of worship, prayer, and prophecy in the nativity pericope of Luke 1:5–25 provide a bridge and bond to the Old Testament. A Gentile author – Luke writing a Gospel to a Gentile from a biblical Jewish perspective of the Old Testament – demonstrates knowledge of the Old Testament and considers it to be a critical religious document to provide a bridge at the beginning of the Gospel. It establishes the centrality of the Old Testament in the composition of the new religious documents of the Christian faith in the first century CE. The thematic bridge is to appeal to the most populous and authoritative religious document from that time. This makes a strong case for the acceptance of the Old Testament to the Bible as a Christian document. This has dual implications: (i) It is a theological and missional attempt by Luke to draw the attention of Gentile receptors of his Gospel to the Old Testament theme of worship, prayer, and prophecy and (ii) to attract biblical Jews to his Gospel. The point of divergence here is that the Old Testament worship and prayer are often led by priests, and prophecy can be issued by priests during the Day of Atonement when they come from the Holy of Holies chamber of the Temple. But these are not led by priests in the Gospel of Luke. However, in the nativity account, the ministry of Jesus and his disciples has not yet started. The activity of the Holy Spirit is critical and demonstrates a similar phenomenon in the Old Testament; hence, a bridge to the Old Testament. In effect, the event narrated in Luke 1:5–25 is an Old Testament religious phenomenon that has been captured at the beginning of the Gospel to serve as a bridge and bond to the Old Testament. This is unique to the Gospel of Luke. It is an indication that a proper understanding of the Gospel of Luke is dependent on the Old Testament as background.

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