Think for a minute of the different ways in which you can write an essay.

**What sources do you use?**
- Do you sit down all on your own in complete quiet and write it all out of your own head?
- Do you ask someone else who has useful information on the topic to let you use their material?
- Do you refer to other books in your account, making use of them but all the time using material in your own way rather than just copying?
- Do you just put on your Sony Walkman and write the first thing that comes into your head on the subject?

There are many different ways to write. Luke, in the introduction (or 'prologue') to his Gospel, tells us something of how his Gospel was originally compiled. Here is what he says:

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Dear Theophilus,

Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning. And so, since I have carefully studied all these matters from the beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you. I do this so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught.

Luke, chapter 1, verses 1-4
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**Who was Theophilus?**
- The name Theophilus means 'lover of God' in Greek. Is it addressed to any believer who loves God? Or is this a particular person called Theophilus?
- Some scholars think that Theophilus was an influential Greek, perhaps a convert to Christianity.
- Some think that Theophilus gave Luke money to research and write his Gospel.
- The words 'your Excellency' may well indicate that Theophilus was an important official.

Luke says that he has produced his Gospel from three sources:

**Source 1:** The actual events 'the things that have taken place among us' (verse 1)

**Source 2:** The spoken reports 'what we have been told by those who saw these things ...' (verse 2)

**Source 3:** The written reports 'Many people have done their best to write a report of these things ...' (verse 1)

We are going to look in more detail at source three, the written reports. The first three Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, have material in common. That is why they are called the synoptic Gospels. The word 'synoptic' means 'looks like'. The written reports used by Luke include material from Mark's Gospel and from elsewhere. But where did the three synoptic writers find their information about Jesus? And when each writer came to write his own Gospel, who used whom? Who copied from whom?
• Miracle stories
• Parables and sayings
• Stories about what Jesus did
• Pronouncement stories where Jesus makes a statement.

The verses listed above in Mark's Gospel are examples of the last two types of story. The call of Levi, the tax collector, is typical of the stories about what Jesus did. Whilst the meal at Levi's house is a pronouncement story because it ends with Jesus saying something or pronouncing something quite important — and usually something which is easy to remember.

Two other sources need to be mentioned.

The passion story (Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion) It is likely that from very early on after the death of Jesus, the account of his last week and his crucifixion were written down. All four Gospels include it and the story is basically the same. Details in the four accounts of the passion story do differ, however, and this suggests that there may have been more than one written account of events. Look at Mark 14–15. These chapters read as one whole story with no need of ‘and’s and ‘whens’ to connect different sources.

The Old Testament The Jewish scriptures, which Christians call the Old Testament, provided a rich source for the Gospel writers. They frequently quote from it in their writings. Jesus was a Jew and so were his close disciples. The Christian church started among Jewish people who believed that Jesus was their special leader, the promised ‘Messiah’ foretold and expected in their own scriptures.

Luke’s special material
The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, have a lot of material in common. Luke contains 1,150 verses. About 350 of these are in common with Mark’s Gospel. So that leaves 800 verses. Of these, another 200 can be traced to be material which is shared between Matthew and Luke — the two writers must have had a common source for this material. This material is called ‘Q’, from Quelle, the German word for ‘source’. The remaining 600 verses are unique to Luke. This is always known as ‘L’ material. What does this material tell us about Luke’s interests?

• He is interested in the supernatural activity of God. Right from the start of the Gospel to its end there are miracles, angels, signs and wonders. Luke continually mentions the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and his disciples.

• He cares deeply about the sick. More than any other Gospel writer, Luke includes stories about Jesus healing the sick. This supports the view of those who think Luke was a doctor.

• Luke has good news for the outcasts and the poor — they matter! This is the only Gospel which includes the parables of ‘The Lost Son’, ‘The Lost Coin’, and ‘The Lost Sheep’.

• The good news about Jesus is for all people, not just Jews. Luke includes a lot of material about Gentiles (non-Jews). He includes, for example, the famous story of the Good Samaritan. Luke’s Gospel and his second volume, Acts, may be the only two books in the New Testament written by a Gentile.

• Prayer is important. Luke continually records Jesus praying in all the important decisions he has to make.

• Women have rights too. Throughout Luke’s Gospel, special attention is given to what women think and do. Luke is the only Gospel writer who consistently spends much time writing about women.

• Luke wants the world to know that something joyful has happened. Luke writes that Jesus’ birth will bring joy. Chapter by chapter in the Gospel, where Jesus heals and helps people, his ministry is accompanied by joy and thanksgiving. Even at the very end.
Jesus went back again to the shore of Lake Galilee. A crowd came to him, and he started teaching them. As he walked along, he saw a tax collector, Levi son of Alpheus, sitting in his office. Jesus said to him, 'Follow me.' Levi got up and followed him.

Later on Jesus was having a meal in Levi’s house. A large number of tax collectors and other outcasts were following Jesus, and many of them joined him and his disciples at the table. Some teachers of the Law, who were Pharisees, saw that Jesus was eating with these outcasts and tax collectors, so they asked his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with such people?’ Jesus heard them and answered, ‘People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call respectable people, but outcasts.’

On one occasion the followers of John the Baptist and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came to Jesus and asked him, ‘Why is it that the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but yours do not?’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you expect the guests at a wedding party to go without food? Of course not! As long as the bridegroom is with them, they will not do that. But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.’

Mark 2:13–19

Scholars usually agree that these are quite separate stories which have been brought together as examples of events in Jesus’ early ministry. But what happened before they were included in the Gospel? Were they passed on by word of mouth? Often the Jews passed down traditional stories from parents to children in spoken (oral) form without ever writing them down. This is known as the ‘oral tradition’. There is a lot of agreement about the sort of stories which are the basic source material for the synoptic Gospels. These stories have been listed under various headings. Here are four different kinds:
after Jesus leaves his followers and is taken back into heaven, they are filled with ‘great joy’. These are some of Luke’s special themes and from them we can begin to form an idea of what sort of writer he was.

**Luke’s Gospel**

Luke was writing with a purpose. He wanted people to receive the message that was so important to him. He was not just writing a book about Jesus’ life, like a biography. He was selecting his special material carefully in order to communicate a particular message to a particular audience.

The word ‘Gospel’ means ‘good news’. The four Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, wrote because they believed that Jesus was important. They believed that Jesus was the good news. They believed that, in Jesus, God had come close to people, and that when Jesus spoke and did things he was revealing God to them. So the four Gospels are not biographies which observe Jesus’ life, they were written by people who had faith and believed in the importance of Jesus as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

Throughout this book we will be asking the question, ‘what did Luke believe about Jesus?’ But before we do that, there are some other questions we need to ask to form a clearer picture of Luke.

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**Question time**

1. Luke’s Gospel has an introduction. Another name for it is a ____________.

2. Luke’s Gospel is addressed to _____________.

3. In the introduction Luke names three sources he has used. They are _____________.

4. Matthew, Mark and Luke are together called the _____________.

5. The Synoptic Gospels were written about _____________. years after the death of Jesus.

6. What is meant by ‘oral tradition’?

7. Why are the first three Gospels called the Synoptic Gospels?

8. Where did the Synoptic writers get their information about Jesus?

9. Name four different kinds of story about Jesus. How do you understand the meaning of one of them?

10. What were Luke’s special interests? Make a list of them and then decide whether there is any one particular issue (for example, the sick, women, etc.) that is of importance today in our society. Why do you think this is so?

**To do**

Compile your own ‘gospel’. What good news would you tell the world? What would be your ‘special material’? Why did you choose that and leave other things out? Here is an example:

**The good news according to Mandy Rudd**

I want to tell you the good news about the following three things:

- Animal Rights. This is important because _____________.
- How to get on with people _____________.
- The meaning of life _____________.

**Talking point**

When did Luke write his Gospel? Who was Theophilus? Is it important to know?
1. What was Luke's main reason for writing the Gospel?

2. Who was Theophilus? How do we know?

3. Luke claims that what he is writing down comes from ......................... of Jesus. These ......................... were men and women who had first hand experience of the life and teachings of ........


5. How did Luke use this Gospel source? Which other Gospel writer also did this?
6. What is an 'Oral Tradition'? Give an example.


8. Using historical knowledge, we can tell that Luke's Gospel was written AFTER............................?

9. We can also tell that Luke's Gospel was written BEFORE..............................

A reasonable guess for the date of writing is therefore ............................AD.

11. Popular Church tradition has it that Luke was a doctor. Was Luke a doctor? Read MK 5:24-26, and then LK 8:43 to help you answer this question.

12. What is a 'gentile'?

13. If, as some scholars suggest, Luke was not Jewish, what do we expect his Gospel would emphasise?
What happened when you were born? Are there any stories about your birth that your family tell to one another? The race to the hospital? Your midnight arrival? Whatever? In the Bible, and in other stories of the ancient world, the birth of a baby with an important destiny was often accompanied by special signs and events. In Luke’s Gospel, Luke begins the story of Jesus’ life and ministry with the story of another birth – the prophet John the Baptist.

**John is born**

READ LUKE 1:5–7, 11–13, 18–20, 39–40, 57–64, 80

John’s birth was not like any other child’s. There were signs that he was going to grow up to become a great prophet. Luke points these out clearly. He often shows how John was either fulfilling or echoing something already mentioned in the Old Testament. Here are the signs surrounding John’s birth.

**Sign 1:** The Spirit appears

Prophecy had disappeared from Israel about 400 years before John the Baptist was born. The Jews had the written books of the Old Testament prophets, just as we have today, but John’s birth saw the beginning of a new activity of the Spirit. John’s birth was to be the beginning of a new age, accompanied by joy and gladness. In this new age the ability to prophesy was to be given even to ordinary people, like John’s mother and father.

**Sign 2:** An angel appears to Zechariah and tells him that he will have a son called John. This is a little like the story of the appearance to Manoah before the birth of Samson in the Old Testament.

**Sign 3:** ‘The babe leapt in her womb’ (Luke 1:14). This shows that John, even before his birth, recognizes the greatness of Jesus and rejoices.

**Sign 4:** Elizabeth is too old to have a baby. Yet the fact that Elizabeth did have a baby was a sure sign that her child came from God and had a special task to do.

**Sign 5:** John is likened to Samson and Samuel – two national leaders of the Old Testament. John is also likened to the prophet Jeremiah in that he is possessed by the Holy Spirit even before his birth.

**Sign 6:** Luke shows clearly that it is the task of John to announce Jesus. John appears to have the power of Elijah, a prophet in the Old Testament. Luke even quotes Malachi 3:1 to make the claim that Elijah will appear again to preach the Messiah. This is Luke’s way of setting the stage for Jesus. John is the Elijah who was prophesied. Jesus is to be the Messiah.
• A gallery of prophets
  • Elijah was a famous prophet, written about in the Books of Kings. He opposed the evil King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The Jews believed that he would return again to proclaim the Messiah.
  • Samuel was famous for his great strength. However, he disobeyed God and ended his life by being blinded by his enemies.
  • Jeremiah was a prophet who prophesied doom and became very unpopular. Once he was even thrown into an underground reservoir because of his preaching. Yet, in the end, events proved him right.

It is clear from Luke’s writing that John’s birth had all the signs that he would grow up into a great man. In fact, that is just what he did do.

Question time
1. Give the names of John the Baptist’s parents.
2. Write a summary of the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist.
3. Who was Elijah and why is he important in the story of John’s birth?
4. Explain how Luke shows that the birth of John the Baptist was an important and special event.

To do
Write or draw the story of the birth of John the Baptist from the time the angel appeared to Zechariah to the point where he regained his speech.