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Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and Savior

The question of Jesus's identity is raised repeatedly in Luke's Gospel.

Scribes: "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (5:21)

Table guests: "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (7:49)

Disciples: "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" (8:25)

Herod: "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" (9:9)

Luke's Gospel story provides three primary answers to this question: Messiah, Lord, and Savior.

Jesus Is the Messiah—from Birth

Luke 9:18–20

Jesus asks: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Answers are given:

John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets.

Then Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter answers, "You are the Messiah of God."

But Luke also makes a point that the other Gospels do not: Jesus is the Messiah from the time that he is born.

Luke 2:25–32

The prophet Simeon has been told he will not die until he sees the Messiah. When the infant Jesus is brought to him, he declares that he may now die in peace, for the word has been fulfilled: even as an infant, Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus Is the Lord—from Birth

Luke 20:41–44

Jesus stymies the religious leaders with a riddle: If the Messiah is the “son of David,” why does David call him “Lord”? Jesus is Messiah, but not *only* Messiah—he is also Lord.

In the book of Acts, we learn what this means: Jesus is not simply the Jewish Messiah (Christ), he is also Lord for all people (Acts 2:21, 36)—and because he is Lord, Christians pray to him, as they would to God (7:59; cf. Luke 23:46).

But Luke also makes a point that the other Gospels do not: Jesus is the Lord from the time that he is born (even before).

Luke 1:43

Mary, while she is pregnant with Jesus, visits her relative Elizabeth. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth exclaims, “And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord has come to me?” Jesus, not even born yet, is already identified as Lord.

Jesus Is the Savior—from Birth

Luke's Gospel is the only one of the Synoptic Gospels to call Jesus "Savior" and to identify the very purpose of his earthly life as being to bring salvation.

Luke 19:10

Jesus tells Zacchaeus that he has come "to seek and to save the lost." Jesus does not just become Savior at the end of his life when he dies on the cross; he is already bringing salvation to people during his earthly ministry.

Indeed, Luke makes a point here that no other Gospel makes: Jesus is Savior from the time that he is born.

Luke 2:30

The prophet Simeon looks on the infant Jesus and declares that he has seen the salvation that God has prepared in the presence of all peoples. Thus Jesus is identified as the one who brings God's salvation while he is just a baby.

Compare this to Matthew's Gospel. There, the angel who announces Jesus's birth says that he *will* save his people from their sins, meaning that he will become Savior at the end of his life when he dies on the cross to bring people salvation from sin and death. Luke believes that there are many things other than sin and death from which people need to be saved (demonic influences, disease, hunger, poverty, ostracism, attachment to wealth, etc.), and he relates how Jesus saves people from these things during his life on earth. Thus Jesus is to be identified as Savior from birth.

Here is one verse that expresses Luke's understanding of Jesus:

Luke 2:11

"To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,
the Lord."

Messiah—born this day

Lord—born this day

Savior—born this day

Jesus is Messiah, Lord, and Savior—from birth.