

THE *M*ISSION OF THE *C*HURCH
ACCORDING TO *L*UKE

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The Society for
THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH
...all of us committed to the worldwide mission of Jesus

Foreword

Between the angelic gospel of the great joy for *all the people* and Paul's preaching in Rome to *all who came to him*, the mission *ad gentes* of the Church is the principal theme of Luke-Acts. Everything, every event, is related to the universal mission of the Church...

After establishing that the Acts of the Apostles is the second volume of the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2), Father Eugene LaVerdiere, S.S.S. explores the missionary dimension of Luke-Acts. He notes, in fact, that the Church's mission "to the nations" is the principal theme found in Luke's Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. "Luke," Father LaVerdiere writes, "opens our minds to understand the universal mission of the Church according to the scriptures." That mission, as found in Luke-Acts, is that we be Christ's witnesses, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Propagation of the Faith is given a unique responsibility in the Church to remind the baptized of their obligation to be witnesses of their faith in Christ to all peoples and nations, and to encourage their active participation in this mission. This most recent presentation by Father LaVerdiere makes a significant contribution to helping each of us — the followers of Jesus today — realize the importance and the urgency of our own witness to the Lord of all, both here at home and "to the ends of the earth."

Bishop William J. McCormack
National Director, The Society for the Propagation of the Faith

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus spoke solemnly on the Mount of Olives (see Acts 1:12) to his apostles whom he had chosen. Before he ascended to heaven, he commissioned them to be his witnesses, first in Jerusalem, then throughout Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

As he was commissioning the apostles, Jesus also summarized the history of the mission of the early Church. According to the Acts of the Apostles, the mission of the Church began in Jerusalem on the Jewish feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41). It spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-25). Then it spread from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth.

The Acts of the Apostles is the second volume of the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2), relating the life and the mission of the Church to the life and the mission of Jesus. Without the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospel of Luke would be truncated. Without the Gospel of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles would be meaningless.

In the first volume, Luke tells the story of Jesus' mission, climaxing in his commission "to the Eleven and those with them" (Luke 24: 33; see Luke 24:46-49). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke tells the story of the mission of the Church, introduced by Jesus' commission "to the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1:2; see 1:8). As such, we can refer to the two volumes *Luke-Acts* as one gospel story.

In Luke-Acts, Jesus commissioned the Church twice, first at the end of the Gospel (Luke 24:46-49) and later at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:8). While the first commission introduces the second, the second commission completes the first. Therefore, we have to read and reflect on the two commissions together:

“Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, *would be preached in his name to all the nations*, beginning from *Jerusalem*. You are *witnesses* of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed *with power from on high*.” Luke 24:46-49

“You will receive *power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you*, and you will be *my witnesses in Jerusalem*, throughout Judea and Samaria, and *to the ends of the earth*.” Acts 1:8

The two commissions (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8) came from Jesus as the risen Lord before he ascended to heaven (Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:9-11). Both of them refer to the Holy Spirit (the promise of my Father), to Jerusalem, to the universal mission of the Church (to all the nations, the ends of the earth), and to her witness.

In the Gospel, Jesus' commission focused on the whole community, including the Eleven and those with them (Luke 24:33), while the commission in the Acts of the Apostles focuses on the apostles whom Jesus had chosen (Acts 1:2; see Luke 6:12-16).

The Mission ad gentes in Each Gospel

In each Gospel, Jesus gave the Church a mission *ad gentes*, but from a different point of view, relating to the pastoral purpose of each Gospel.

In the Gospel of **Matthew**, the risen Lord gave the Great Commission to the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus commissioned the Church *to make disciples*, baptizing them and teaching them. As Jesus taught his disciples, the Church will teach all nations.

According to the Gospel of **Mark**, Jesus spoke on the mission of the Church in his eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives:

“Watch out for yourselves. They will hand you over to the courts. You will be beaten in synagogues. You will be arraigned before governors and kings because of me, as a witness before them. But the gospel must first be preached to all nations.” Mark 13:9-10

In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus commissioned the Church *to proclaim the gospel*. As Jesus proclaimed the gospel of God to the Jewish people, the Church will proclaim the gospel of God to all nations. As Jesus suffered in his passion, the Church will suffer persecution.

In the Gospel of **John**, Jesus commissioned the disciples where they were staying behind bolted doors:

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” John 20:21

After the Lord Jesus breathed on them, he said to them:

“Receive the Holy Spirit,” empowering them to give the Lord’s peace to the whole world (John 20:22).

In John’s Gospel, Jesus commissioned the Church *to give peace* to the nations through the forgiveness of sins: “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (John 20:23). As Jesus gave the peace of God to his disciples, the Church will give peace to the whole world.

In the Gospel of **Luke** and the **Acts of the Apostles**, Jesus, in the upper room where the Eleven and those with them were assembled, first gave the commission to the Church to be *his witnesses*. Later Jesus delivered this commission on the Mount of Olives where he assembled the apostles whom he had chosen. As Jesus and his mission was conceived by the Holy Spirit, the Church and its mission will be conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The Context in Luke-Acts

In Luke’s Gospel, the story of the universal mission of the Church began in the story of Jesus’ birth when the angel announced the gospel to the shepherds: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy *that will be for all the people*. For today in the city of David a savior — *the Savior of all people* — has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). Jesus would be the Savior, the Messiah, and the Lord for all peoples and all nations throughout the world (see Acts 4:12).

In the story of Jesus’ birth, the shepherds who were there represented Jesus’ disciples (Luke 12:32), especially the overseers who were appointed by the Holy Spirit to tend the Church of God that Jesus “acquired with his blood” (Acts 20:28). Like the shepherds, who were watching over their flock, the overseers were watching over the whole flock.

The gospel of great joy is that Jesus would be the one savior for the whole human race, the one Messiah for all, the one Lord of all peoples. As Peter said in his discourse to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-12): "There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Later, Peter will say in his discourse to the household of Cornelius, a Roman centurion: "You know the word [that] he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, *who is Lord of all*" (Acts 10:36).

The story of the universal mission of the Church will conclude at the end of the Acts of the Apostles with Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God in Rome. As a prisoner, "he remained for two full years in his lodgings. He received

In the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus commissioned the Church to be *his witnesses...*

all who came to him, and with complete assurance and without hindrance he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:30-31).

Between the angelic gospel of the great joy for *all the people* and Paul's preaching in Rome to *all who came to him*, the mission *ad*

gentes of the Church is the principal theme of Luke-Acts. Everything, every event, is related to the universal mission of the Church, including Jesus' inaugural discourse in the synagogue of Nazareth.

Jesus' Inaugural Discourse

For his inaugural discourse, Jesus himself chose the passage from the scroll of Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
and to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

Luke 4:18-19 (see Isaiah 61:1-2)

Jesus referred to Elijah who was sent to nourish "a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon" in times of universal famine (Luke 4:25-26; see 1 Kings 17:7-24). Jesus also referred to Elisha who was sent to heal "only Naaman the Syrian," a Gentile leper (Luke 4:27; see 2 Kings 5:1-27).

Referring to Elijah and Elisha, Jesus challenged the synagogue in his native place to bring the gospel of God to the poor *everywhere*, to bring liberty to captives *of all nations*, and to bring sight *to all peoples*.

In his inaugural discourse in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus introduces his mission as the Lord of all and also the mission of the Church to all the nations.

The Blessing of Jesus

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus raised his hands and blessed the Eleven and those with them (Luke 24:50) while he was taken up to heaven:

"Then he led them [out] as far as Bethany, raised his hands, and blessed them. As he blessed them he parted from them and was taken up to heaven."

Luke 24:50-51

The ascension was introduced at the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem: "When the days for *his being taken up* were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).

From the geographical point of view, Jesus' journey would end in Jerusalem with the cleansing of the temple (Luke 19:45-48).

But theologically and thematically, the journey would end with his ascension. Jesus' journey to the ascension would include his Last Supper with his disciples, his passion, his burial, and his resurrection.

The principal theme of the story of the ascension is the blessing of Jesus, bringing to mind the story of Abraham. As God said to Abraham, "In your offspring all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Acts 3:25; see Genesis 22:18; 18:18). Jesus was the expected offspring of Abraham, the father of many nations. As Jesus was ascending to his Father, he blessed them (Luke 24:50-51), fulfilling the promises to Abraham. Blessing them and their mission, he also fulfilled his mission on earth as the savior of the human race (Acts 4:12).

With Jesus' ascension, we are standing on the threshold of the mission of the Church "to all the families of the earth." We will cross the threshold with the fulfillment of Jesus' words: "I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Historical Background

Luke wrote his two-volume Gospel for many communities in the eastern Mediterranean in the mid-80s of the first century. He wrote his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles for the churches Paul established in the 50s and the early 60s, also for the churches spawned by them. The majority of the Christians in these churches came from Gentile background.

In the 80s, the communities experienced many

difficulties; internal difficulties concerning money (see Acts 5:1-11) and sharing their possessions "according to each one's need" (Acts 2:45), and also concerning leadership (see Acts 6:1-7). They also experienced external difficulties, such as persecution from every side, from the Jewish side and the Gentile side. Many stories in the Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles reflect their internal and external difficulties.

At the beginning, the Christians, supported by their communities, were zealous to proclaim the gospel of Jesus. Later, as they met many difficulties, their zeal for the mission to all nations cooled down. They blamed Paul for their problems.

A lot of people in the Pauline communities thought that Paul in his mission to the nations, his mission *ad gentes*, went too far. Paul betrayed the gospel by accommodating it to the Gentile civilization and culture, by abandoning the Jewish traditions observed by the primitive Christian community in Jerusalem (see Acts 15:1-5). The same communities had no problem with Peter and his mission.

In the Gospel and the Acts, Luke defended Paul, connecting him and his mission to Simon Peter. Like Peter, Paul was blessed by an appearance of the risen Lord (Luke 24:34; Acts 9:1-9). Paul's gospel message paralleled the message of Peter (Acts 13:16-41; see Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32).

Luke emphasized that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. At the same time, he emphasized that Peter opened the Christian mission to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18). When Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-48), he acted on a solid precedent, established by Peter. That is why Peter is very important in Luke-Acts.

Peter actually opened the mission of the Church to the

Gentiles. When he went to Caesarea to the home of the centurion named Cornelius, Peter spoke to Cornelius' family, his relatives and his close friends:

"In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.

Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him." Acts 10:33-35

After the introduction of his speech, Peter summarized the life of Jesus:

"You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, *who is Lord of all...*" Acts 10:36

He concluded his speech:

"To him all the prophets bear witness, that *everyone who believes in him* will receive forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10:43

While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius' household, upon all who were listening to the word of the Gospel. They spoke in tongues and glorified God, like the apostles at Pentecost. Seeing that they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter asked:

"Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?" Acts 10:47

That is how the mission of the Church to the Gentiles (*ad gentes*) began. Peter inaugurated the Gentile mission by baptizing the household of Cornelius. Following Peter, Paul proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, to the Gentiles in the Roman provinces of the eastern Mediterranean.

Luke also connected Paul to the Church in Antioch and the Pauline communities to the primitive community of Jerusalem (Acts 9:23-30; 6:1-12:25; 15:1-35). That is why

Jerusalem is very important in Luke-Acts. That is why Jesus at the end of the Gospel said to the Eleven and those with them "that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, *beginning from Jerusalem*" (Luke 24:47). At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus said to his chosen apostles, "You will be my witnesses *in Jerusalem*, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Luke connected "the ends of the earth" to the city of Jerusalem.

The Setting in Luke-Acts

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Lord Jesus commissioned the apostles after appearing to them for forty days. Like Moses was on the mountain of God for forty days (Exodus 24:18), like Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert during forty days (Luke 4:1-2), the risen Jesus appeared to the apostles for forty days, sharing meals with them and speaking to them about the kingdom of God (see Acts 1:3). So Jesus prepared them for their baptism by the Holy Spirit and formed them for their mission "in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Formed by the Lord Jesus and baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; Luke 3:16), the apostles would be effective witnesses of Jesus.

In the Gospel of Luke, the commission concludes the story of Jesus' mission with his appearance to the Eleven and those with them on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1, 13, 33, 36). On the first day, the early Christians celebrated the risen Lord as "the first born of all creation" (Colossians 1:15).

The expression, "on the first day of the week," literally "on day one," evokes the Greek translation of Genesis. On day one, God said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). In

Luke's Gospel, the risen Lord is the light of all nations (see Luke 2:29-32).

At the end of his appearance, before he ascended to the Father (Luke 24:50-53), Jesus commissioned the community to be witnesses "to all the nations" (Luke 24:46-49). As he was ascending, raising his hands, Jesus blessed them and their mission.

In his commission in the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus introduces the story of the mission of the Church, when he was present to the apostles during forty days, and speaking to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3-5). With this, Jesus formed them as faithful witnesses. At the end of the series of the appearances, Jesus commissioned them on the Mount of Olives to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In the Gospel, the commission (Luke 24:46-49) is a synthesis of the mission of the Church. At the same time, Jesus related the mission of the Church to the scriptures, while he "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

Jesus announced that the Eleven and those with them would be the witnesses of his passion and resurrection. They also would be the witnesses of Jesus' teaching, fulfilling the scriptures that it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise on the third day. It is also written that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in Jesus' name to all nations. Like the expression, "the ends of the earth," the expression, "all nations," includes the Gentiles as well as the Jewish people. For this mission, Jesus will send them the promise of the Father.

With this commission, Jesus was addressing "the Eleven and those with them," including the women who visited the tomb of Jesus (Luke 24:9-10) and the disciples of Emmaus

(Luke 24:33). As such, Jesus commissioned the whole Church, including each person, to be his witnesses to all the nations.

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The commission in the Gospel also refers to the early mission of the Twelve in Galilee (Luke 6:12-16; 9:1-6) and the mission of the seventy-two accompanying Jesus and the Twelve in Jesus' journey to the ascension (Luke 10:1-12).

With the commission in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:8), Jesus completes the commission to the Church (Luke 24:46-49) by focusing on "the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1:2; see Luke 6:12-16) and giving the historical program of the mission of the Church. In this commission (Acts 1:8), Jesus addressed the foundation of the apostolic Church (Acts 1:2) for the last time before he ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12).

The Promise of the Father

*A*t the end of the Gospel, Jesus addressed the community before his ascension: "I am sending the promise of my Father upon you" (Luke 24:49a). The Lord Jesus himself

will send the promise of his Father as the Holy Spirit.

Sending the Holy Spirit, Jesus will clothe them “with power from on high” (Luke 24:49b). In the biblical cultures, garments are a symbol of a person’s identity. “Clothed with power from on high” by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the members of the community would receive a new identity from above.

At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, the Lord Jesus commanded them “to wait for the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak” (Acts 1:4; see Luke 24:49). Jesus connected “the promise of the Father” to their baptism: “for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). They will receive the promise of the Father of Jesus with their baptism at Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit will transform the Jewish feast of Pentecost into a Christian event.

The Holy Spirit came upon Mary at the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:34-35). The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus after his baptism while he was at prayer at the conception of his mission (Luke 3:21-22). Similarly, the Holy Spirit would come upon the apostles at the conception of the Church (Act 2:1-4), quickening the apostolic community with the breath of God, inspiring them to proclaim the Gospel with tongues of fire.

The Mission ad gentes (Acts 1:8)

After describing the setting (Acts 1:3-7), Luke presents Jesus’ commission to the apostles whom he had chosen (Acts 1:8) as the last words of Jesus before he was taken up to heaven (Acts 1:9-10; see Luke 24:50-52). While the apostles were looking up at the sky, two men dressed in white garments (Acts 1:10; see Luke 24:4) said to them:

“Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.” Acts 1:11

The mission of the Church will begin with the coming of “the promise of the Father” and it will end with the second triumphant coming of Jesus. Like John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord, who prepared the way of Christ’s first coming, the Church now is the forerunner of the Lord, preparing the Second Coming of the Lord.

As the forerunner of the Lord, our mission is to “prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths,” so “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:4-5; see Isaiah 40:3-5).

Jesus’ commission to the apostles unfolds in two parts:

First, as the risen Lord, Jesus promised that the apostles would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Second, Jesus commissions them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you...”

At the end of his farewell discourse, Jesus promised the Eleven and those with them that he would send “the promise of my Father” on them: “Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The promise of his Father was to be fulfilled on Pentecost when they would be “clothed with power from on high.”

At the beginning of his commission, Jesus promised the apostles: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8a). With the commission, Jesus

interpreted his expression, "power from on high," as the power of the Holy Spirit.

When the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them, they would be clothed with the power from on high; that is, from the creative Spirit of God. In this context, the image of clothing refers to their baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). Clothed with power from on high, they were to receive a new identity. Traditionally, the early Christians used the image of clothing in their baptismal formula. As Paul reminded the Galatians of their baptism, he said: "For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were *baptized* into Christ have *clothed yourselves* with Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27).

The power would not come from their natural birth, but from their rebirth from on high.

Like Jesus who was conceived by the power of the Most High (Luke 1:35), the Church will be conceived by the power from on high (Luke 24:49). Like the mission of Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22; 4:14, 18), the mission of Church will be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 38-39).

"and you will be my witnesses..."

With their new identity, they will be witnesses of Jesus. In his farewell discourse, Jesus declared to the Eleven and those with them: "You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48). The expression, "these things," refers to two things written in the scriptures:

*Jesus' passion and resurrection: "the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day" (Luke 24:46);
the mission of the Church: "and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all*

the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

In his final commission, Jesus declared that the apostles whom he had chosen would be witnesses of him. With the commission, Jesus interpreted the expression, "the witnesses of these things," as "*my witnesses.*"

The apostles will be witnesses of Jesus, especially as the Christ (the Messiah) and the Lord. Traditionally, the title the Christ refers to the historical event, Jesus' passion and the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). Traditionally, the title the Lord refers to Jesus' continuing state after his resurrection as the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Philippians 2:11).

The Church will witness to Jesus as the Christ and to his passion and resurrection, also to Jesus as the risen Lord, the Living One (Luke 24:5; Acts 1:3).

At our baptism, we received the power from the Holy Spirit to witness to Christ's passion and resurrection. We died with Christ; we were buried with Christ; we rose with Christ. As the followers of Christ, we are his witnesses!

In our Eucharist, we receive the power from the Holy Spirit to witness to Jesus as the Lord of all (Acts 10:36, 40-42). As Paul said to the Corinthians: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). As the forerunners of the Lord, we are his witnesses!

In his farewell discourse, Jesus said that the Church would preach "to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47b). In his commission, he interpreted the expressions, "all nations," and "beginning from Jerusalem," by specifying: "*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

"...in Jerusalem..."

The Gospel of Luke began in Jerusalem with the story of the annunciation to Zechariah when he was offering incense in the temple. It also ended in Jerusalem with the story of the ascension: "and they [the community] were continually in the temple praising God" (Luke 24:53).

The Acts of the Apostles began in Jerusalem where the apostles were staying in the upper room, devoting

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themselves "with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers" and sisters (see Acts 1:13-14). It ended in Rome with Paul under house arrest, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:30-31).

The mission of Jesus was fulfilled in Jerusalem, the city of the Last Supper, the city of Jesus' passion, resurrection and ascension.

The mission of the Church began in Jerusalem, the city of Pentecost and the city of the ideal primitive Christian community. According to Luke, the members in the first community of Jerusalem "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the

breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Peter's Discourse at Pentecost

The mission in Jerusalem began with Peter's discourse on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41). According to Luke, the Lord appeared first to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34). The Greek word used for his appearance is *ophthe*, "he appeared," but literally, "he made himself to be seen" by Simon, transforming him into a proclaimer of the Gospel, in our terms, transforming him into a Christian missionary.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter's first discourse is a model of the proclamation of the Gospel according to the scriptures (Acts 2:14-41). In Luke's defense of Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles, he presented him as a follower of Peter in his kerygmatic discourse in Jerusalem. In Acts, Paul did not do anything without a precedent from Peter. Peter had sterling credentials in the Christian community of Jerusalem.

After proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially the passion and the resurrection of Jesus, Peter challenged the crowd:

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit." Acts 2:38; see Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8

Around 3,000 accepted the gospel, "the teaching of the apostles" (Acts 2:42) and were baptized (Acts 2:41).

The Teaching of the Apostles

In their baptism, the Jerusalem community accepted "the teaching of the apostles." Accepting "the teaching of the apostles" from the lips of Peter, the members of the primitive community in Jerusalem devoted themselves to "the teaching of the apostles." As the newly baptized, they taught like the apostles taught, beginning their witness of

life by their *koinonia, communio*, the breaking of the bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).

The expression, "the teaching of the apostles," is both active and passive. The early Christian community not only accepted the content of the teaching of the apostles; as believers who were baptized, they taught like the apostles taught. They taught like Peter taught, witnessing Jesus with wonders and signs (Acts 2:43; 5:12). Following Peter, they taught like Jesus taught not only with words but deeds.

At Pentecost, the Jewish people came to Jerusalem from every nation and city. They came from Parthia on the confines of India. They came even from Rome, the imperial city (Acts 2:9-11). According to Luke, the Christian mission was not limited to the Roman Empire. On Pentecost, this gathering in Jerusalem was a symbol of "the ends of the earth." As such, the primitive community, including people from the whole world, was a symbol of the universal Church and its mission.

"...throughout Judea and Samaria..."

After the martyrdom of Stephen, the community dispersed to witness throughout Judea and Samaria, prodded by the persecution: "On that day, there broke out a severe persecution of the church in Jerusalem, and all were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). Like Jesus, who faced his passion, the apostles, as the followers of Christ, would face their passion.

In his mission, Jesus sent his disciples as messengers and as forerunners to prepare his visit to Samaria. When they entered a Samaritan village, the Samaritans would not welcome Jesus, "because the destination of his journey was

Jerusalem" (Luke 9:53).

In the mission of the Church, Samaria would welcome Philip and his witness, as he proclaimed the Christ and the good news of the kingdom of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, Philip baptized many men and women of Samaria (Acts 8:5, 12). When the apostles heard that Samaria accepted the Word of God (see Acts 6:7), they sent them Peter and John, who went down, praying "that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:15). Completing their baptism, Peter and John laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17).

After they gave witness to Jesus and after they proclaimed the word of the Lord, "they returned to Jerusalem and preached the good news to many Samaritan villages" (Acts 8:25).

"...and to the ends of the earth."

After witnessing in the countryside of Judea and Samaria, the apostles proclaimed the gospel "to the ends of the earth," that is, to the whole human race or to all the nations (Luke 24:47). Through the words of Jesus, Luke speaks on our mission *to all nations*.

The expression, "the ends of the earth," came from

As Jesus opened the minds of the two disciples traveling to Emmaus to understand the scriptures (see Luke 24:45), Luke opens our minds to understand the universal mission of the Church according to the scriptures.

many passages in the Old Testament. With this expression, Luke most probably referred to the book of Isaiah, particularly his second Song of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 49:1-7; see 42:1-4; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12).

“Hear me, O coastlands,
listen, O distant peoples.
The Lord called me from birth,
from my mother’s womb he gave me my name...
It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant,
to raise up the tribes of Jacob,
and restore the survivors of Israel;
*I will make you a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.*”

Isaiah 49:1, 6

With the expression, “the ends of the earth,” Luke evokes the entire second Song of the Suffering Servant as he summarizes Jesus’ life and his mission. As Jesus opened the minds of the two disciples traveling to Emmaus to understand the scriptures (see Luke 24:45), Luke opens our minds to understand the universal mission of the Church according to the scriptures. †