

John the Baptist had his own agenda and followers. Josephus notes his call to virtue and his baptising activity. (Antiquities Book 18 Chap 5) He notes no connection with Jesus and certainly nothing to say that John was a forerunner of Jesus. In Acts (18:24) Apollos is noted to have used John's baptism in his movement. Even today, the Mandeans trace their baptism based faith in part back to John the Baptist, so it is likely that there were John the Baptist influenced groups amongst the Jewish diaspora butting up against Luke's community.

Luke, therefore, probably has to deal with a similar competing movement to his own and for a gentile audience the differences may not have appeared to be that great.

Reading Luke, we are presented with John presented as the greatest of all Jewish prophets, so great that his birth is accompanied by special signs that he has been set apart. This is then intertwined with Jesus' story.

Luke separates John from Jesus in a qualitative sense. John is the last great prophet and is of a prophetic line. His birth is accompanied by OT parallels (Elizabeth=Sarah, etc) and even in utero he is a prophet. He is the fruit of the old in a figurative sense.

Jesus is of a royal line and is something altogether new and therefore born of the new age with a young mother.

Luke, by his removal of John to prison prior to Jesus baptism allows a greater separation than Matthew does, as Matthew has John witness the heavenly blessing of Jesus. The question of John's followers as to whether Jesus is the Messiah makes little sense in Matthew, but perfect sense in Luke, who has him still holed up in prison. This may even be a way of explaining it away if John's followers in Luke's day do not recognize Jesus.

I don't think the question of John being subordinate is the point of his presentation in Luke. John's ethical teaching is elaborated in Luke and is certainly consonant with any of Jesus' social policy as presented by Luke. John is the greatest and last of the old prophets but Jesus has changed everything so that anyone in the Kingdom is superior to John.