

Zechariah is Redeemed

Lesson for December 11, 2022

Unit I: God Prepares the Way

Scriptural Background: Luke 1:57-80

Printed Text: Luke 1:57- 66, 76-79

Key verse: *And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,* (Luke 1:76, NIV)

Word Study

“Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?” So cries an exasperated Charlie Brown in the classic *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Amid the commercialism, the materialism and the general confusion of the holiday, Charlie Brown seeks merely to understand. In this unit, by looking at how “God Prepares the Way” we are looking for ways to prepare our lives for the Child to be born anew in our lives. Matthew’s Gospel ponders the dilemma of Joseph as he was asked by God to open his life to Mary’s infant. And in our pondering, we ask whether we are willing to open ourselves up to the mystery of Christ’s incarnation. This week we consider the birth of John the Baptist, who like the three spirits in Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, urged us to be ready to change our attitudes and actions in light of the prophet’s call to prepare the way of the Lord.

Today, we come to one of the “first carols of Christmas.” This time, the song of praise is on the lips of the priest, Zechariah. What Zechariah is celebrating is that he sees at last God’s fulfillment of his ancient covenant promises to deliver and save his people, and that Zechariah’s son John will be the one to introduce the saving Messiah to the world.

Key Terms

- 1. Forgiveness** (verse 77) - Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you. Forgiveness in the Bible is defined as the letting go of sin. This includes forgiving everyone, every time, of everything, as an act of obedience and gratefulness to God. It acknowledges the sacrifice God made through His Son Jesus who died to restore the relationship between God and man.
- 2. Praising** (verse 64) - Praise, in the original Greek, means to sing, to tell of, to give, or to confess. In simpler terms, it means to be thankful for God's blessings, and to declare that good news to God and to others.
- 3. Prophet** (verse 76) - Prophet comes from the Greek word for “spokesman,” which explains another definition of prophet: someone who speaks on behalf of God. The Hebrew word for prophet is *navi*, “to proclaim, mention, call, summon.

Lesson Background

Luke 1 tells the story of the miraculous conceptions of both John and Jesus. Before John the Baptist was born, four centuries had passed without an active prophet in Israel. In a sense, it was a famine of the Word of God (Amos 8:11). Yet at the right time, one would come to restore the hearts of the fathers to the children in the spirit and power of Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6). This week's lesson includes a portion of a song or psalm of praise of Zechariah (known as the Benedictus). By the Holy Spirit, Zechariah interpreted the birth of his son, John the Baptist as the forerunner to the Messiah who was also appointed to proclaim Messiah's coming.

Lesson In Depth

I. Bring the Gift (Luke 1:57-60)

Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son: We see here, a woman far beyond her childbearing years who has brought forth a son. Perhaps none believed when she had told them. These very same people that were so close to her knew how Zechariah had a vision in the temple and was left unable to speak. All sorts of things were probably going through their minds. The promise was fulfilled just as God said it would be. God always keeps His promises.

They rejoiced with her: This fulfilled Gabriel's promise recorded at Luke 1:14 (many will rejoice at his birth). William Barclay relates the custom of the time: "When the time of the birth was near at hand, friends and local musicians gathered near the house. When the birth was announced and it was a boy, the musicians broke into song, and there was universal congratulation and rejoicing. If it was a girl, the musicians went silently and regretfully away!"

And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child: In accord with God's commandment (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:1-3; Philippians 3:5), the circumcision was done to seal the Abrahamic covenant with God.

and they called him Zechariah, after the name of his father: It had become customary to name a child at circumcision. The ritual brought together family and friends, who in this case, pressured the parents to name the baby "after his father", probably intending this as a gesture of respect to Zechariah.

Not so: Both Zechariah and Elizabeth knew the name of the child had to be John, according to the command from the angel (Luke 1:13). Elizabeth had learned from Zechariah in writing (verse 63), everything Gabriel had said to him. The father had gotten word to Elisabeth what his name was to be even though he had lost his voice. Elisabeth speaks up and says his name is John. Now there is a stir. Why is this baby to be named John?

II. Bring the Praise (Luke 1:61-65)

There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name: “John” means the grace of Jehovah. Here is a name none of their relatives have used.

And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called: The priests conducting the circumcision ceremony appear to have assumed that since he could not speak, he was also deaf.

And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John: Now, Zechariah responded in total faith. It wasn't “I think his name should be John.” For Zechariah, this was recognition of a fact, not a suggestion. Even though he had failed before, God gave Zechariah a second chance at faith. He gives the same to us today.

Immediately his mouth was opened: Just as Gabriel said, Zechariah could speak again. The instant he put his doubt behind him, Zechariah's tongue was loosed and he spoke. He spoke, praising God. It was fitting that Zechariah's first words were praise to God. His chastisement for disobedience had not made him bitter. Instead, it made him want to trust God all the more, at every opportunity.

And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judea.

Fear: The normal response, and an appropriate one (12:5), when someone is confronted by a divine visitation or a mighty work of God (Judges 6:22; 13:22; Mark 16:5). Luke seems specially to take note of this; he often reports fear in the presence of God and His works (30, 65; 2:9-10; 5:10, 26; 7:16; 8:25, 37, 50; 9:34, 45; 23:40).

Throughout all the hill country of Judea: Jerusalem and the surrounding area. John the Baptist's reputation began to spread from the time of his birth. Now these neighbors and cousins know that there has been something super-natural about this birth. Word spread fast that something miraculous has happened here.

III. Bring the Light (Luke 1:66, 76-79)

What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him: We see that the Lord is with John. The people even from the first know that John is anointed of God from birth to do some great job.

Verses 67 through 75 records Zechariah's song of praise. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaims his expression of gratitude to God both for the fulfillment of his people's messianic hopes – Zechariah now understands the Messiah is coming — and also for giving him a child. These verses are essentially a hymn of adoration.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest: After the initial focus on Jesus, the Holy Spirit then led Zechariah to speak of his new-born son and his place in God's great plan.

- John was a true prophet, the prophet of the Highest (Luke 1:76).
- John had the unique calling to go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways (Luke 1:76).
- John would teach and give knowledge of salvation to God's people (Luke 1:77).
- John would show people the remission of their sins (Luke 1:77).
- John would give light to those who sit in darkness (Luke 1:79).
- John would guide God's people into the way of peace (Luke 1:79).

Lesson Summary

Today's lesson completes the lesson from last week. Though this lesson focuses on Zechariah, the complete picture can only be seen when we look comprehensively at both of them. John the Baptist's parents knew with certainty the implications of their son's birth. The events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist have implications for God's people.

- **Our ultimate calling is to live to bring glory and honor to God.** Despite their childless life, both Zechariah and Elisabeth continued to serve God and wait on His promised Messiah.
- **Unanswered prayer should not be seen, by itself, as a judgment on a person and their relationship with God.** Too often, we privately speculate about others when God does not give them their desires even after many prayers, that perhaps they are harboring sin or perhaps they asked for that desire with selfish motives.
- **Wait for the coming Messiah.** At the opening of the Gospel of Luke, the Israelites had been waiting for centuries for the coming Christ. Elizabeth's name means "My God is an oath" or "My God is abundance." She represents those Jews who held out hope despite the long delay of the Messiah's birth.

Christians face a similar temptation in our times. We know that Jesus is that promised Messiah. He came, died, and rose again, ascending to the Father to await the time of His return. And now, we are the ones waiting. We wait to hear that trumpet sound and see Him coming in the clouds.

- **Even into our advanced age, God can bring life into the world through each of us.** God doesn't favor the young or the old. Mary was a young, adolescent virgin, and Elizabeth was advanced in years. Through each woman, young and old, He brought life that contributed to His plan of redemption.
- **We are seen by God.** Elisabeth and Zechariah testify to all of us that faithfulness does not go unseen by our God, nor unrewarded.
- **Rejoice!** Zechariah rejoiced in God's work to bring salvation into the world. We can rejoice with Zechariah because of God's work to bring salvation into the world.

Zechariah means “God has remembered.” He remembers us too. How will you praise him for your remembrance? What promises in God’s Word do you find difficult to believe? Memorize them, meditate on them, and claim them from God. Is there a situation in your life that seems impossible? Commit it to God in prayer and ask Him for the patience to live with it graciously until He changes it.