

Luke has carefully gathered the information from eyewitnesses and told us of the angel Gabriel's announcement to Elizabeth and to Mary. Mary then went down to visit her aged cousin to see the miracle for herself and stayed three months to the time of John's birth. We've heard the predictions of the angel Gabriel and the prophetic songs of Mary and Elizabeth. Now we are about to hear a prophecy from Zechariah, the father of John who had been mute for nine months for doubting God.

*57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.* Luke 1:57-58 Communities and families were much closer in those days. We are so independent in this culture that it is hard to relate to the joy of the community unless you are in a small church or Bible study group that really cares for one another. What joy and wonder they must have experienced at this miracle!

*59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John."* Luke 1:59-60 The law prescribed that on the eighth day baby boys were to be circumcised (Leviticus 12:3<sup>i</sup>; Luke 2:21<sup>ii</sup>) and by tradition that is when they were named as well. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 17:11<sup>iii</sup>). As a Hebrew child, John was a recipient of the covenant promises. Science has shown the eighth day is the day that babies blood will coagulate the fastest to stop bleeding. We can see God has a reason for His commands. Those gathered for the event expected his name would be the same as his father, but Elizabeth very emphatically told those gathered that his name was not going to be Zechariah. Zechariah had communicated the angel's command to Elizabeth to call him John.

*61 And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered.* Luke 1:61-63 Traditionally the child would be named after a relative. God doesn't follow traditions. He makes and breaks them. To settle the issue, they looked to Zechariah and gestured to him to tell them the name of the baby. On a writing tablet he wrote, "His name is Yohanan!" – which means the Lord has given grace. And no wonder this would be his name for he was preparing the way for the One who would bring the greatest gift of grace (John 1:16<sup>iv</sup>), which is salvation through His substitutionary death. They wondered at why this was the choice of the name. It seems Elizabeth did not tell others what Zechariah had conveyed to her. Their wonder is about to become even deeper.

*64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.* Luke 1:64 Suddenly Zechariah could hear and speak again, and the first thing he did was to praise God. ESV translates it as "bless" God, and the word can be used in that way. It is a compound word from the two words, "good" and "word", in other words, to speak well of, or praise. Zechariah and all Israel had been longing for

the coming of the Messiah, and now the one who would prepare the way for Him was in their midst.

*65 And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.* Luke 1:65-66 The neighbors knew something supernatural had just taken place. It was such a shocking event to hear Zechariah suddenly begin praising God after nine months of silence. I would imagine the presence of the Holy Spirit was overwhelming. It caused them to remember the event and ponder in their hearts what this implied for the baby. What would he become? They were under the thumb of Rome. Would he be a warring deliverer or a prophet? As John grew, the hand of the Lord upon him was obvious. Their wonder was partially answered in the prophecy that followed from Zechariah.

*67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people* Luke 1:67-68 Filled with the Spirit, he began to lyrically prophesy with approximately thirty-three allusions and quotations from Scripture. The beginning of the prophecy isn't about his son, but Mary's. I would think she was still present as she stayed through the ninth month. The song begins with the very phrase with which David installed his son Solomon on the throne of Israel (1 Kings 1:48<sup>v</sup>). The ultimate son of David was now three months old in Mary's womb. The 400-year wait for Malachi's prophecies regarding the Messiah was finally over.

The God of Israel has visited His people (Exodus 4:31<sup>vi</sup>; Luke 7:16<sup>vii</sup>). To be visited by God in Scripture means that He cares and intervenes in their affairs. He has redeemed His people. This means to have paid a ransom so that they can go free. The language points to the visitation and redemption from Egypt, which is symbolic of deliverance from this evil world (Galatians 1:4<sup>viii</sup>). There they were freed after the death of Egypt's firstborn. God would soon redeem us by the death of His firstborn.

*69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,* Luke 1:69 This clearly shows that Zechariah is speaking of Mary, for Zechariah is in the line of Levi while Mary is the line of Judah and David. *Horn* is the term used for power, especially for a powerful leader. But this leader is powerful to bring not a physical deliverance and salvation, but rather a spiritual salvation. This was where the confusion about the Messiah came in that day. When the term salvation is used it can mean from physical oppression or salvation of the soul in relationship to God.

Think for a minute which is more meaningful. Physical salvation is temporal and conditional. Jesus lived and died under the oppression of Rome, and yet it did not hinder Him in any way for He had complete faith in the Father and His mission. The worst thing He ever said about political leaders was that Herod was a fox (Luke 13:32<sup>ix</sup>). He was much harsher on spiritual leaders who were leading people astray. Spiritual salvation is eternal in nature. The heart can be free like Jesus was regardless of the physical government. The fact that God has raised up One who will powerfully

bring us salvation and redemption is better by far than having the best human king or president. This is good news for all people throughout time! This is history's turning point. The promise to David to have one of his descendants reign on his throne was coming to pass in an unexpected way.

*<sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;* Luke 1:70-71 It sounds very physical and it will be physical at the Second Coming of Jesus (See Revelation 19; Jeremiah 23:5,6<sup>x</sup>), but first the greater deliverance from a greater enemy who inspires the hatred against us. In Christ we are saved from the Destroyer and his right over our eternal souls. Jesus' redemption of our souls means Satan has no more legal right over us. We are the Lord's and will forever be with Him! In time it will be physical as well, but first the spiritual which is so much more important. Without spiritual salvation the physical salvation is meaningless, and in fact can be detrimental, for we would soon become like those who hate us.

*<sup>72a</sup> to show the mercy promised to our fathers* Luke 1:72a The promise of mercy expressed in deliverance from enemies was first expressed to Abraham. God vowed to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him and by extension his descendants (Genesis 12:3<sup>xi</sup>). He promised to be with and bless Isaac (Genesis 26:3<sup>xii</sup>). Jacob told Joseph that God would be with him (Genesis 48:21<sup>xiii</sup>), and when God is with us who can be against us. But the nation was presently occupied by Rome. There is a greater mercy than political freedom. The other promise of mercy is that the world would be blessed through the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:3<sup>xiv</sup>). Moses promised a deliver like himself who would arise from among the people and to Whom we must listen (Deuteronomy 18:15<sup>xv</sup>). He delivers from the bondage to sin (Romans 6:22<sup>xvi</sup>).

*<sup>72b</sup> and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup> that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,* Luke 1:72b-74 The holy covenant that he swore to Abraham is probably referring to Genesis 22:16-18<sup>xvii</sup>, and possibly to David regarding the eternal reign of his son. The offspring of Abraham were promised they would possess the gates of their enemies. Jesus clarified what this ultimately meant. Again, it is greater than conquering passing kingdoms of this world. He said the gates of *hell* will not prevail against us (Matthew 16:18<sup>xviii</sup>). Do you see the shift from physical to the even greater spiritual? The army of Christ marches through this world's kingdoms and smashes the strongholds of Satan in the hearts of men and leads them to the Deliverer to become redeemed souls in the eternal kingdom of God (2 Corinthians 10:3-5<sup>xix</sup>).

*<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.* Luke 1:74 We are delivered by the One who God was sending through the womb of Mary, from the line of Abraham and David, not to reign over others, or tax the nations we subjugate, but rather to serve God without fear of man *in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days*. We have come to the point in this prophecy that theologically confirms that this One who was coming was much more than a king of a worldly kingdom. He is more than just David part two, for He can free us from fear, and make us holy and righteous

eternally. That had never been the case throughout Israel's history. The prophets made that clear and Jesus made it even clearer. It was and is today the desire of every godly soul. Jesus explained that we do not fear what man can do to us because we know our heavenly Father (Matthew 10:28<sup>xx</sup>). It is His justice alone that we fear, and that fear directs us to daily walk in Christ Jesus who makes us holy and righteous. The power of Satan and the flesh is broken by the power of the Spirit whom we receive through the sacrifice of Jesus.

*<sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,* Luke 1:76 Now Zechariah speaks directly to the little baby Elizabeth is holding. John's calling is to be the prophet of the Most High; going before the Lord and preparing the way for Him. He is Jesus' prophet, but notice that Zechariah refers to the One he goes before as the Lord!

See how Zechariah first spoke of the Messiah and of the faithfulness of God to keep His Word and fulfill the prophecies. He declared the mission of the Messiah, and then he spoke of his son's mission. Zechariah's heart longed for the spiritual transformation of his nation and the fulfillment of the prophecies. That was first and foremost. He understood that God had come in the flesh (John 1:14<sup>xxi</sup>). The key prophecy regarding John's role is Malachi 3:1<sup>xxii</sup>. There it plainly says the messenger is preparing the way for the Lord of Hosts! No wonder Zechariah called John the prophet of the Most High preparing the way of the Lord. The Gospels clearly refer to Jesus as one with God.

*<sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,* Luke 1:77 John would indeed give the people knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins by pointing them to Jesus. He would point to Jesus and declare, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" John 1:29 John's ministry was to call people to repent so that they would be able to hear and receive Jesus. Those who received John would receive Jesus. His thundering words against sin and the need for repentance leveled mountains of pride in the hearts of man and filled valleys of despair to make a highway for Jesus to enter in with salvation (Matthew 1:21<sup>xxiii</sup>; 26:28<sup>xxiv</sup>).

*<sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high* Luke 1:78 All this was because of the nature of God Himself, full of compassion and tender mercy. He is again referring to a prophecy of Malachi from chapter four verse two. *<sup>2</sup> But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.* Malachi 4:2 The sun was about to rise in the land of darkness (Isaiah 9:1-2<sup>xxv</sup>). Spiritual light was about to expose the false teachings of darkness, and it is still shining in all the world.

*<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*" Luke 1:79 The effect of the birth of Jesus and His life and death is that light has been given to all of us who lived our lives in darkness and were overshadowed all our lives by fear of our approaching death and judgment. (See Hebrews 2:14-15<sup>xxvi</sup>.) The light of God's love and provision in Jesus set us free from

fear, free from death, free from guilt, and guided our feet into the way of peace. That is to live in peace with God which results in peace in our hearts and peace toward others.

Man's traditions, corrupt leaders, and the hopelessness of their occupied land was indeed like sitting in darkness where no one could see any hope. But with the birth of John the horizon began to glow. The Son was coming at last. And when He enters as the light of the world, suddenly all becomes clear. Hope returns. People will begin to see the problem is not Rome but our sinful hearts! The salvation He brings comes with exuberant joy that our future is secure and more blessed than we can imagine. But **it is not just about the future, for each day He guides our feet in the way of peace.** Like Mary, we are the servants of the living God bringing light and hope to others. Now Jesus in you is the light of the world (Matthew 5:14<sup>xxvii</sup>). Contrary to our brainwashed culture, there is meaning to our lives. We are here for a purpose. We can experience the presence of God in our lives and be sure of eternal joy. We should be leaping like calves released from the stall. (Matthew 13:43<sup>xxviii</sup>).

*<sup>80</sup> And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.* Luke 1:80 John was full of the Holy Spirit from the womb. His parents surely taught him about his mission from those Malachi prophecies his father referred to, for that was where the angel had directed him (Luke 1:17<sup>xxix</sup>; 4:5<sup>xxx</sup>). His parents probably died when John was a young, possibly around the time of his bar mitzvah at age twelve or thirteen. Then John went out into the wilderness where the Spirit of God could prepare him for his ministry. There is a record in the Qumran writings of a young man named John who stayed there for a while. Qumran was considered the wilderness region, near the traditional site of the Mount of Temptation. There he would have had access to the Isaiah scroll from which he would frequently quote regarding his mission (Isaiah 40:3-5<sup>xxxi</sup>). (Jews considered a person ready to teach or to lead others at the age of thirty. It was probably around that age when John began preparing the way for Jesus shortly before Jesus' ministry began. <sup>xxxii</sup>)

"Has 'the Sunrise from on high' filled your life? Do you have 'the knowledge of salvation'? Is Christ your mighty 'horn of salvation'? Are you assured of 'the forgiveness of sins'? Have you been delivered from 'the shadow of death'? Are you able to 'serve him without fear'? Are your feet treading 'the path of peace'? If not, you need the Sunrise—you need the Christ who came to die for you—you need the spiritual realities of Luke 2, the birth of Jesus - within you!"<sup>xxxiii</sup> Then you too will leap like calves released from their stall.

## Questions

1 What does the name John mean and why is it significant? 2 What did Zechariah do when he could finally speak? 3 What is significant about the first line of his prophecy? 4 Why is spiritual salvation so much great than physical salvation? 5 How did Jesus clarify the meaning of deliverance? 6 What does Jesus enable us to do? 7 What was John's mission? For whom? 8 What was John to give and why? 9 How does God guide our feet? 10 How is our joy described?

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<sup>i</sup> **Leviticus 12:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

<sup>ii</sup> **Luke 2:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

<sup>iii</sup> **Genesis 17:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

<sup>iv</sup> **John 1:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

<sup>v</sup> **1 Kings 1:48 (ESV)**

<sup>48</sup> And the king also said, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it.'

<sup>vi</sup> **Exodus 4:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

<sup>vii</sup> **Luke 7:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

<sup>viii</sup> **Galatians 1:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

<sup>ix</sup> **Luke 13:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.

<sup>x</sup> **Jeremiah 23:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

<sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

<sup>xi</sup> **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

<sup>xii</sup> **Genesis 26:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Genesis 48:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

<sup>xv</sup> **Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

<sup>xvi</sup> **Romans 6:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Genesis 22:16-18 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

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xviii **Matthew 16:18 (ESV)**

18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

xix **2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (ESV)**

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

xx **Matthew 10:28 (ESV)**

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

xxi **John 1:14 (ESV)**

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

xxii **Malachi 3:1 (ESV)**

1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

xxiii **Matthew 1:21 (ESV)**

21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

xxiv **Matthew 26:28 (ESV)**

28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

xxv **Isaiah 9:1-2 (ESV)**

1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. <sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

xxvi **Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV)**

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

xxvii **Matthew 5:14 (ESV)**

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

xxviii **Matthew 13:43 (ESV)**

43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

xxix **Luke 1:17 (ESV)**

17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

xxx **Luke 4:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,

xxxi **Isaiah 40:3-5 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

xxxi (While Luke says that Jesus was *about* thirty when Jesus began (Luke 3:23 my emphasis), we know He was born before 4B.C. - the year Herod the Great died - and was crucified A.D. 30. His ministry was only three years, so Jesus would have been closer to 32 years of age when His ministry began. pdw)

xxxiii Hughes, Kent, Preaching the Word – Luke, Volume I: That You May Know the Truth.