Zechariah's Song Luke 1:67-80 ABC 12/6/20

For many, this has been a dark year physically, socially, emotionally, mentally, & financially. People have lost loved ones, jobs, homes, & health. Does this mean Christmas should be cancelled? Of course not. The original Christmas happened in dark times as well. One of the most famous of all Christmas verses was written by Isaiah, predicting a Christmas to come: The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them (9:2). In Isaiah's day, Israel had been invaded, their temple was destroyed, homes burned, & they were driven from the land they loved. They were people walking in darkness but Isaiah tells them that help is coming. In vs 6 he says, a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us. The darkness before the sunrise of Jesus' birth was long & black. The Scriptures say the people of Israel had been living in darkness & in the shadow of death (Lk 1:79), like being lost in a desert at night, fearing for their lives. The faithful remnant knew the messianic sunrise would come because Malachi had promised it in the concluding lines of the OT: The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; & you will go forth & skip about like calves from the stall (4:2). So despite over 400 long years of darkness, the people were looking for the sunrise. God was going to send His Son to bring light to the world. But it didn't look like what they imagined. Instead of a mighty king, we see a, pregnant teen-ager who will be at the mercy of government decrees, (kind of like us only she was told to travel & we're told to stay home). There'd been recent glimmers of light indicating the dawning was imminent, such as Gabriel's announcement of John to Zechariah, his message of Jesus to Mary, the meeting of the 2 pregnant mothers, Elisabeth's joyful praise, Mary's song, & now the birth of John the Baptist. These flickers of flame were signs that bright rays of messianic sunlight would soon shine brightly. There was a darkness then, there's a darkness in the world now but there's also a darkness in you & me as well. But this is the great news of Christmas: God sees our mess & enters our broken world to be light in our darkness. Last week we saw Mary's song & that God is mindful, mighty, & merciful. Today we come to Luke's 2nd song in his Christmas playlist, the song of Zechariah. When Herod was king of Judea there was an elderly priest named Zechariah

& his wife, Elisabeth. They were both righteous before God but they had no children & were getting up in years (Lk 1:5–7). God sends Gabriel with a message to Zechariah: 1:13-17

Zechariah couldn't believe the news. & said as much. Gabriel responded: 19-20

9 months later Elisabeth gave birth to their son. With his birth, a faint glow on the horizon was almost perceptible. On the 8th day after his birth, the neighbors started to call the child *Zechariah* after his father, but, in obedience to God, Zechariah wrote on a tablet, **His name is John** (1:63). The people asked, "What then will this child *turn out to* be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him (Lk 1:66-67). Zechariah, speechless for 9 months, responded in faithful obedience, his tongue was freed, & he gave this song of praise. Luke introduces it by saying, **Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit & prophesied** (67). Like Mary's song, his too was filled with Scripture. He sings almost entirely in OT terminology. Scholars say there are as many as 33 allusions & quotations from the OT in this song of praise. ¹ 68-79

Zechariah's song of blessing isn't about his miraculous son but about how God had worked to bring about the messianic sunrise in the coming birth of Jesus. 9 months earlier he couldn't believe his wife would have a child. Now, filled with the Holy Spirit, he's so confident of God's redeeming work in the coming Messiah that he puts his words in the past tense. For those of faith, a promised act of God is as good as done. Zechariah had learned to take God at His word. *God has visited & redeemed!* (68). His song is an joyfull chain of praise from beginning to end. Praise to God for keeping his promise to David & to Abraham. Praise to God for keeping His promises to Zechariah in giving him his son John, the forerunner of the Christ. & praise to God for the coming **Sunrise from on high,** the arrival of God in human flesh.

1. David 68-71

He has visited us. That expression is often used in the OT as God's gracious visitation of His people when they're in need. Heaven comes down to earth; the supernatural invades the natural; God actively works out His eternal plan. At the time of the Exodus God visited His people & enabled them to escape Egypt (Ex 4:31). This *visitation* language is about God graciously coming to His

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, pp 386–389

people in need.² The covenant God made with David was His promise to David that he'd be succeeded by his son Solomon, who would build the temple, & that an ultimate greater successor would establish that throne forever. The covenant was delivered by the prophet Nathan when David was at the height of his power & had expressed his desire to build a temple for God. But instead of David building a house for God, God would build a house for David. 2 Sam 7 says:

The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. When your days are complete & you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up <u>your descendant after you</u>, who will come forth from you, & I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, & <u>I will establish</u> the throne of his kingdom forever (11b-13).

Those vss record God's irrevocable, unconditional promise to David & his household (cf 2 Sam 23:5). This promise of an enduring king & kingdom stirred the hopes of the faithful in Israel. Isaiah gave well-known expression to this great hope:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; & the government will rest on His shoulders & His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David & over his kingdom, To establish it & to uphold it with justice & righteousness From then on & forevermore (Is 9:6-7).

Zechariah sings about what will happen as if it already had. Messiah's forerunner, was only 8 days old. The Messiah, Jesus, wasn't even born yet. But Zacharias was so certain God would do what He'd promised that he spoke of **redemption** as if it had already taken place. He knew the birth of his son signaled that God was about to visit His people & bring the provision that made salvation possible.³ This was to be the greatest moment in Israel's history, the culmination of all redemptive hope & anticipation. God **has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant** (69). Who is this **horn of salvation?** It can't be referring to Zechariah's son, John the Baptist. Zechariah was a priest which made him a Levite. The house of David was from the tribe of Judah. It can only be referring to Jesus. This metaphor isn't referring to a trumpet or trombone but to an animal's horns, especially that of an ox, symbolizing strength & power (Dt 33:17). The lifting up of the horn in the OT refers to an animal using its horns in a display of power (Ps 148:14).⁴ Zechariah's

² D. A. Carson, <u>"A Naming Ceremony, a Prophecy, & Jesus,"</u> in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library*, Lk 1:57–80.

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., <u>Luke 1–5</u>, MacArthur NT Commentary, p 97

⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1-9*, p 383

redemption. The good news of Zechariah's song, the good news of Christmas, is that God has given us a horn of salvation. Jesus is the great horn of salvation for all those who call upon & trust Him. But no one appreciates gifts that meet no needs or satisfy no desires. We don't value or love an offer for help unless we know we're in need. Vast numbers of people look upon Jesus & the Christmas story as nothing more than unwanted, useless Christmas presents because they don't know they have a terminal illness called sin. For them, the horn of salvation is a useless gift. But it's the only hope of recovery from this deadly disease of sin that infects our souls. We all have it because all have sinned & fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves & the truth is not in us (1 Jn 1:8). & the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Every one of us will die from this disease if there is no horn of salvation for us. But He has visited, redeemed, & raised a horn of salvation. 70-71

It was that promised kingdom, with its hope & expectation of salvation from Israel's enemies, & from the hand of all who hate the Jewish people (Ps 106:10), that prompted Zacharias's praise. He believed the kingdom's arrival was imminent (as did Jesus' disciples, even after His resurrection, Acts 1:6). He knew his son was the forerunner of the Child that Mary was pregnant with. But Zachariah didn't foresee that the unthinkable would happen & his people would reject & execute their own Messiah. Yet Israel's disobedience can't nullify the promises of God (Rom 3:1–3). The King will one day return to establish His earthly kingdom, just as God promised David. In that day the remnant of Israel will come to repentance & faith &, they will look on Me whom they have pierced; & they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, & they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn (Zech 12:10). They will cry out joyously, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! (Mt 23:39). Today this mighty horn of salvation is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him (Heb 7:25). Whoever we are, whatever we've done, no matter how detestable our sin, Jesus, the horn of salvation, can save us completely & eternally. We must praise God for the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first & also to the Greek (Rom 1:16). This makes Christmas good

news to all who believe. 1 Jn 3:8 says, The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Heb 9:26 tells us Christ has appeared once for all to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Earlier in Hebrews we read that Christ partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, & might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. By His death He paid the debt for our sin, so that if we follow Him in faith, we're freed from our guilt. The hope of Zachariah & the future remnant of Jews, as well as all true believers, is sure & will certainly come to pass. God won't forget His covenant with David. The redeemed will experience the blessed joy of serving & worshiping Jesus the King during the millennial kingdom & throughout eternity. Only then will the fervent longing of the children of Israel for salvation from their enemies, & from the hand of all who hate them be fully realized. God kept His promise to David by sending Jesus.

2. Abraham (72–75) God's covenant with David in 2 Sam 7 & with Abraham in Gen 12, & all the covenant promises of God throughout the OT, find their fulfillment in Jesus. Zechariah's praise for God's fulfilling the Davidic Covenant through Jesus naturally moved back to the Abrahamic Covenant because the promises to David rested upon God's original promises to Abraham. This goes back another 1,000 years, not 1,000 BC at the time of David, but 2,000 BC, at Abraham's time. God's choosing of Abraham was a narrowing down in order to provide an opening up. It was a narrowing down to one couple & the beginning of a new race, which would get narrowed down to David's family, & narrowed down finally to Jesus, the God-man, in order that, through this line, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God's covenant with Abraham is primarily one of mercy, revealing that God is gracious & compassionate to undeserving people. The stream of mercy that began with God's blessing of Abraham flows down through the centuries to provide forgiveness, redemption, & eternal blessing to all who have faith in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. This covenant was 1st expressed when God promised Abraham that He'd make a great nation of him & that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen 12:1–3). When

⁵ D. A. Carson, <u>"A Naming Ceremony, a Prophecy, & Jesus,"</u> in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Lk 1:57–80.

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., <u>Luke 1–5</u>, MacArthur NT Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 105.

God restated the promise, He emphasized that Abraham's offspring would be like the stars of heaven & Abraham believed in the LORD; & He reckoned it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). God sealed this covenant in a dramatic way, one which emphasized its unilateral, unconditional nature. Gen 15:7-10 says that God...

said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." He said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?" So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, & a three year old female goat, & a three year old ram, & a turtledove, & a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him & cut them in two, & laid each half opposite the other.

This killing of animals symbolized the seriousness of a covenant. Those involved would walk between the pieces of the dead animals symbolizing that the same thing should happen to them if they broke their promises. But in this case only God walked between the parts of the slain animals, showing it was an irrevocable promise made by God alone & not dependent on Abraham (17-18). Yet, as great as this covenant was, a greater confirmation was to come when God swore to Abraham that He would keep His covenant. God's oath took place after Abraham's amazing display of obedience in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac through whom the promise of a great nation was to be fulfilled. After God stopped Abraham's hand in midair, God made an unique oath in Gen 22:

By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing & have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, & I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens & as the sand which is on the seashore; & your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice (16-18).

God was so pleased with Abraham's obedience that He swore by Himself since He could swear by no one greater (Heb 6:13), something He'd never done before & hasn't done since. In swearing by Himself, God was in fact saying it wouldn't be dependent on conditions Abraham fulfilled, but was based completely on what God promised. In fact, in saying that God swore by Himself it may infer that the covenant was really made between the members of the Godhead. Father, Son, & Spirit all covenanted together to bless Abraham & his offspring. God was keeping His promise to Abraham by sending Jesus. Although Zechariah, no doubt, didn't anticipate everything that would happen

⁷ Neil Silverberg, https://tccknox.com/2019/11/01/hebrews-6-who-does-god-swear-by/

to Jesus, he has enough of a grasp of Scripture to see these streams of God's promises are coming together & his son is going to announce it.8 From Zechariah's inspired perspective, the effect of this great oath, as fulfilled through the coming of Jesus, wouldn't only be deliverance from enemies, but the enablement for those who believe to serve Him without fear, in holiness & righteousness before Him all our days (74–75). This is what Christ does for the believing heart. He liberates it so we can serve Him. & this is the call of our age: I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living & holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship (Rom 12:1). Joyous service is a hallmark of lives where the Son has risen. Christianity not only delivers us, but infuses our lives with purpose. God kept His promises to Abraham.

3. John Zechariah was experiencing great joy, & as his eyes fell on his newborn son, he now sang of the part his son would play in the new day: 76-77

His son is going to have the job of calling people to repentance & faith in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. & how did John the Baptist preach? How does Luke record these things in chapter 3? The word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. & he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Lk 3:2-3). He did exactly as his dad prophesied. In addition, Zechariah's words focused on the depth of John's ministry. He would give his people the knowledge of salvation. This wouldn't be theoretical knowledge, but personal knowledge of the inward experience of salvation as the result of God's gift. Furthermore, the salvation John would preach would consist of the forgiveness of their sins. John would bypass ritualistic religion & go right to the heart of spiritual life. John's ministry anticipated the work of the coming spiritual Sunrise. Jesus, the apostle John says, came to His own, & those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (Jn 1:11–12). This intimacy with God is extraordinary, like that between a child & a parent. John the apostle would later write, These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 Jn 5:13). Salvation involves the assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

⁸ D. A. Carson, "A Naming Ceremony, a Prophecy, & Jesus," in D. A. Carson Sermon Library, Lk 1:57–80

We see this in Jesus' own name as commanded by the angel: She will bear a Son; & you shall call His name Jesus. Why? Because He will save His people from their sins (Mt 1:21). Jesus said of His own blood, this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28). This was the gospel as Peter & others preached it: Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43). & so our assurance is this: If we confess our sins, He is faithful & righteous to forgive us our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9). What incredible things Zechariah sang regarding his son! True knowledge of salvation & the forgiveness of sins would come from his ministry as people heard him preach & turned to God. This is what the gospel offers. Those who've experienced it can testify there's nothing like it. It's complete & penetrates to the very depths of the soul, transforming it into the character of Christ.

A superficial reading of Lk 1 could make you think, There are 2 rather special births here, John the Baptist & Jesus. Both have angels. Both are miraculous. Isn't that nice. But when you read closely, you find that one serves the other. One announces the other. One is the focal point of all of history. The other is pointing Him out, & this focus on Jesus is central in Luke's gospel. It's central here, &, as the story unfolds, you have the birth of Jesus being made much of in the next chapter, then John the Baptist, when he begins to preach, doesn't point to himself, but points to Jesus. What is John the Baptist's greatest importance? What's he called? **Prophet of the Most High God**. That's not his status but his function. He's to point to Jesus. That's the importance of John the Baptist. We really don't know much else about him, because the important thing about John the Baptist is the way he points to Jesus. Mt 11 is an interesting passage. Jesus says, Truly I tell you, among those born of women, there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist (11). According to Jesus, John the Baptist is greater than Abraham, David, & everyone else. Although Abraham & David pointed to Jesus in many ways, only John was able to say, There He is. That's the Lamb of God. He's the One whose sandals I'm not worthy to undo. He must increase & I must decrease. It fell to John to point out exactly who Jesus was & that's what made John the Baptist great. But then, in the same vs, Jesus adds, Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. What does that

mean? If you're a believer today, you're greater than John the Baptist. That's what Jesus says. & John the Baptist was greater than King David, so you're greater than King David. Obviously, you're not greater in every possible way, so don't get a big head. What Jesus is saying is just as John the Baptist's greatness depended on his pointing to Jesus, so your greatness, my greatness, hinges on the way we point to Jesus. In one sense, we can say more about Jesus than John the Baptist could. He was going to lose his head before long & didn't live to see Jesus' death & resurrection. But every Christian today knows about Jesus' death & resurrection &, as a result, we can point out who Jesus is with greater clarity than even John the Baptist. That's what makes us great, in this sense. John's mission was to prepare people for Messiah's arrival.

<u>4. Jesus</u> Zechariah ended his song with praise for the imminent rising of the sun. <u>78-79</u>

Israel is portrayed as a nation that's lost its way & been overtaken by night. They're stranded in utter darkness in a lonely, howling wilderness. The sky is dark with no starlight. This is a picture of dark despair, desolation, & desperateness. They're helpless. But then a faint change is seen in the east. The sky is no longer black but dark blue. In the darkness forms begin to take shape. Then comes just a wisp of color. The cobalt blue turns to royal blue & a fringe of pink frames the horizon. The dawn is here! They are quickly on their feet, exchanging smiles, rubbing hands, & beginning to cheer. This is what's going on here. The word **Sunrise** was translated in older English versions as dayspring (the day springing up) & in today's versions is given variously as the first light of Heaven (Phillips), the morning light from heaven (NLT), & the Dawn ... from on high (BSB). All give the idea of the appearance of Christ in this world as the light of it. He's the fulfillment of Malachi 4:2, which says, But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. Jesus is the morning star arises in our hearts (2 Pt 1:19). He is the root & the descendant of David, the bright morning star (Rev 22:16). Jesus said of Himself, I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life (In 8:12). Zechariah sings of Jesus visiting us, redeeming us, & guiding us in the way of peace all because of God's tender mercies (78). But before anyone can experience this Dayspring & be saved, God must circumcise their hearts (Dt 30:6). This is the essence of the new & better covenant Jesus brought, a spiritual surgery performed on the sinful heart of man. Only such a transformation (2 Cor 5:17), can break the power of the law of sin. Since the covenants with David & Abraham didn't have the power to change the heart, God provided the new covenant in Jesus. The clearest OT description of this covenant is in Jer 31:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel & with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them & on their heart I will write it; & I will be their God, & they shall be My people. They shall not teach again, each man his neighbor & each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, & their sin I will remember no more (31-34)."

In Jeremiah's time, Israel's situation was desperate. The northern kingdom had already fallen to the Assyrians & the days of Judah were numbered. Jeremiah's warnings of judgment & calls for repentance went unheard. The people's forsaking of God had rendered their situation hopeless. But God promised a new covenant, His unconditional, unilateral, eternal, irrevocable promise to redeem lost sinners from judgment & hell. The promised new covenant wouldn't be like the covenants God made with David & Abraham (32). In this new covenant God promised He'd put His law within them & write it on their heart (33), & give sinners a new heart (Ezek 36:26). God draws sinners to Himself (In 6:44), & to those who come (In 6:37) He promises, I will forgive their iniquity, & their sin I will remember no more (Jer 31:34). This covenant would provide the things all other covenants lacked: a new heart, power to obey God, intimate fellowship with God, & the forgiveness of sin. The new covenant is personal, promising the salvation of individual sinners through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, the **Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (Jn 1:29). God chose to have mercy on hopeless, helpless sinners & bring the new covenant in lesus, with its promise of forgiveness, righteousness, & acceptance with God. When Jesus rises in our lives, gone is the shadow of death & we pass from death to life. Even more, He is able To guide our feet into the way of peace (79), His shalom. This is more than the absence of conflict. It's wholeness & completeness, the sum of all that we need for complete well-being. It's His gift to us. Jesus said, Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful (Jn 14:27). The Prince of peace has come to give us His peace.

With the end of Zacharias's song of praise, the curtain falls on the life of John the Baptist & isn't raised again until the beginning of his ministry 30 years later in Lk 3. The Bible passes over his childhood in silence, revealing even less details about it than it does of Jesus' childhood. All that's known of John during the years between this song & his public ministry is found in vs 80.

He then performed the role predicted of him as Messiah's forerunner, proclaiming the new covenant of which his father spoke. Let me close by asking you:

- 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, the Christ who came to die for you. God's display of mercy throughout all of history, & ultimately in Jesus, is still available. That's what Zechariah's saying. He's saying, You can't understand the covenant promises of God, unless you understand what He's done in Jesus, because all those promises point to Jesus. Here's God's mercy in a Person. Christmas is, was, has always been God's plan. We don't get what we deserve, because what we deserve has been borne by Christ who didn't deserve it, so that we might enjoy all the benefits & blessings that become ours in Jesus, which are expressions of God's mercy & grace. PRAY

Communion -- The pinnacle of God's redemptive plan was the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. After living a sinless life of perfect obedience to God's law, He died on the cross bearing the sins of His people. Because God treated Jesus as if He'd lived our sinful lives, God is able through His grace to treat those He's redeemed as if they'd lived Jesus' perfectly righteous life. The incarnation, death, & resurrection of Jesus are the Bible's predominant themes. The OT anticipates His death as the ultimate sacrifice that the OT sacrificial system pointed to. The gospels give the record of Jesus' sinless life & sacrificial death. Acts & the Epistles are a commentary on the significance of His life, death, & resurrection. Revelation gives the details of His return &

millennial reign on earth, & His eternal reign in the new heaven & new earth. The observance of the Lord's Supper commemorates & brings to mind all that Jesus has done for us.

Bread – Luke writes, When the hour had come, He reclined *at the table*, and the apostles with Him. & He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God (22:14-16). & when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (22:19).

Cup – Luke continues, in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (22:20)

Song