

“The Benedictus”

Luke 1:67-79

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.

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, 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us\* from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (ESV)

Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer as “forerunner” to great gift-giver.

- All of the other reindeer used to laugh and call him names, they never let poor Rudolf join in any reindeer games...then one foggy Christmas Eve, Santa came to say, “Rudolf, with your nose so bright, won’t you guide my sleigh tonight?”
- If you were on the Island of Misfit Toys, in the midst of a fog and darkness, and you saw Rudolf coming, you knew one thing for sure, Santa was not far behind.

This is a picture of John’s relationship to Jesus.

As a background to today’s text, Luke covers Zacharias’ run-in with the angel Gabriel.

- He was married to Elizabeth, and like many other women in the Bible, she is barren and they are old now.
- He drew a lot that made him responsible for burning incense in the temple and as he began an angel appeared: “Do not fear...” (13-17).
- He questions Gabriel in unbelief. Gabriel is offended: I am Gabriel!
- Zacharias was made mute until the birth of the child.
- He is born and everyone begins to ask what they will name him...John?
- Zacharias: Yep, John.
- He is given speech again and begins to praise God.

Fear and question: What then will this child turn out to be?

This was the same response to another familiar hero—Rudolf, the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

So it was with John, if he really was the forerunner of the Messiah, then that meant that when the people saw John, they knew Jesus wasn’t far behind.

This was the root of their fear. If Messiah was coming that meant deliverance, and deliverance meant instability.

Let me explain:

- Israel, after leaving Egypt—On one hand, they were free. On the other hand, they were completely reliant upon God to take care of them...at least in Egypt we had food...did you bring us out here to die?
- Although they hated their bondage, they hated instability and discomfort more.

The Jews of John's day were no different. They lived under Roman oppression and, on one hand, they hated it. On the other hand, at least they were comfortable in their bondage.

The question they had to answer at John's birth was: if this is true, do we embrace it, scorn it, or ignore it?

The answer is completely dependent upon how desperate you are to get out of your bondage...if you are tired of it, you'll see this thing—the gospel—as the most wonderful news in the world. If you love your bondage and sin, you see it as terrible, because it mucks up everything.

Zacharias was one of the desperate. He spent his whole life waiting for a child, then a year without speech, and now, when he sees the promise of God fulfilled, he embraces it.

When he speaks, the text says that he was filled with the Holy Spirit and he prophesied...that means his words had authority. In other words, he expected everyone else to embrace it as well.

What does he say? You get the idea that he has picked up this baby and is talking to him...He tells him of three things...

- I. God's Promise to David (68-71).
- II. God's Promise to Abraham (72-75).
- III. God's Promise of Grace (76-79).

## **I. God's Promise to David (68-71).**

### **A. The Covenant**

1. He took David from being a shepherd to being the greatest ruler of Israel.
  - a) Toward the end of his life, David said, "How can I live in a house of cedar [a castle] while the ark of the Lord sits in a tent—I will build him a temple."

2. God comes to Nathan the prophet and tells him that David will not build the temple. Instead, one of his descendants shall (2 Sam 7:12-17).

*12 “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 “He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” 17 In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.*

## B. The Fulfillment

1. Zacharias says that this has happened—God has raised up a “horn of salvation” in the house of his servant David.
  - a) What is the “horn of salvation?”
    - i. On a literary level, it is “synecdoche”—a part for the whole [example: 1000 head of cattle]
    - ii. It is symbolic of the strength and power of a great ox—The horn is a sign of strength and a means of victory.

*In Micah 4:13 God says to Jerusalem, "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron and your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples..."*

2. God is the “horn”
  - a) In the Old Testament, the only one who is referred to as “the horn of salvation” is God Himself.
    - i. God was the One Who delivered Israel from Egypt.
    - ii. God was the One Who delivered Israel from exile in Babylon.
    - iii. God was the One who Would deliver them from the worst enemy of all—sin.
  - b) Zacharias’ language is interesting: God has raised up a “horn of salvation” from the house of David.
  - c) In other words, the “horn” that God promised and the king that God promised are one—Jesus.
3. Jesus saves us from our greatest enemy—sin—by taking it onto Himself and dying on the cross.
  - a) When He was nailed to the cross, so was our sin. When He died, so did its power over us.
    - i. Illustration: In Alien 3, Ripley ends up on a penal planet being ravaged by the nasty alien monster queen. After she has defeated the monster, they

realize that there is one left—inside her. The only way to make certain that the monster never comes back is by giving her own life. At that point, she dives off of a large piece of scaffolding into a vat of molten metal—it is finished [until Alien 4, of course!].

The question, of course, is why would God do this? Why would He become a man and conquer sin, by dying on our behalf? The answer is in Zacharias' next words—His covenant with Abraham.

## II. God's Promise to Abraham (72-75).

### A. Abraham.

#### 1. God initiated a covenant with Abraham and told him...(Genesis 22:16-18)

*“By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”*

#### 2. God not only makes a covenant to bless Abraham, and to fulfill all the demands of the covenant, but He then swears by Himself [an oath] that it will be done.

- a) In other words, God invites His own curse upon Himself if the covenant is violated.
- b) The covenant [perfect obedience] was violated. Therefore in the person of Jesus, again, we see the fulfillment of God's promise.
  1. He bears the curse we all deserve.

### B. Freedom.

#### 1. Because of this covenant and its fulfillment, we are not only delivered from our greatest enemy, but free to serve God without fear.

- a) This is the language of Exodus. Remember, Moses went to Pharaoh on God's behalf and said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let my people go so that they may worship me.’”
  - i. The only way you can really worship God is by knowing that all the barriers have been removed...you can't serve/worship God if you are in bondage to something else.

Hebrews 9:14 says that He has cleansed our consciences of guilt.

- ii. Some of us here have been living with guilt our whole lives and because of that you can't really worship or serve God. You are afraid that someone might find out who you really are, worse yet, God might!

The gospel says that if you have trusted Jesus, the One who has fulfilled God's covenant with Abraham by bearing our curse upon Himself, then you are free—not to continue in your sin, but to worship and serve the true God with a clear conscience.

You see, God honored His covenant with David because of His covenant with Abraham. He honored His covenant with Abraham because He swore by Himself that He would do it. The next question is: why would He swear by Himself to deliver a bunch of people who, by nature, are His enemies? The answer is—God's covenant of grace.

### III. God's Promise of Grace (76-79).

#### A. And you, child...

1. You will have the greatest calling of all: you will be called "the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His way...
  - a) You will bear witness to God's "covenant of grace."
2. In the garden of Eden, God made a "covenant of works" with Adam [and all his posterity].
  - a) If he obeyed perfectly, he would live. If he disobeyed, he would die.
    - i. He disobeyed and, at that point, God would have been justified in destroying him.
    - b) However, immediately after Adam blows it, God makes a covenant of grace—I will do all the work to redeem you. (The seed of the serpent will strike the heel of the seed of the woman, but her seed will crush his head...).
3. The question is why? Why would God be gracious when He could have simply been just?
  - a) The answer is in verses 77-78.
    - i. To give His people the knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of sins because of the "bowels of mercy" of our God.
    - ii. He offers us grace because, not only is He perfectly just, but He is perfectly merciful.

Not only is He furious at sin, but He is compassionate and longsuffering with sinners.

- b) The way He is able to be merciful without violating His justice is by executing all of His justice in the person of Jesus.
  - i. Since Jesus, the horn of salvation, has conquered our enemy, since Jesus has fulfilled the God's covenant to Abraham and borne our curse, He is able to fulfill God's covenant of grace and offer forgiveness.

B. The Sunrise from on high...

1. When the first Adam sinned in the garden, the earth and all his posterity were cursed and lived under the shadow of the law and of darkness.
  - a) However, when Jesus, the last Adam came, dawn came with him in order to shine the light of the gospel in our hearts...2 Corinthians 4:6... *For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

C. Isaiah 9.

Zacharias ends with one of the most famous passages in all of the Bible...we hear it every Christmas:

- 2 *The people who walk in darkness will see a great light;  
Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.*
- 3 *You shall multiply the nation, you shall increase their gladness;  
They will be glad in Your presence as with the gladness of harvest,  
As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.*
- 4 *For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders,  
The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.*
- 5 *For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult,  
And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.*
- 6 *For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
And the government will rest on His shoulders;  
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*
- 7 *There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,  
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness  
From then on and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*