

John's Birth

Luke 1:57-80 ESV

→ continue on in the narrative about the birth of John the baptist
 → shares many similarities with the birth of Jesus
 → we have - as the primary focus of this passage a hymn

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. 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." 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. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 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,
⁷⁸ 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."

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

The Birth and Naming of John -- 1:57-66

Actions

This section has actions and words – a good way to discuss

Elizabeth (57) bore a son – (God fulfills his promises, God keeps his word)

Relatives and neighbours (58-9, 61, 63) rejoice – (God fulfills his promises, God keeps his word) attend to John's circumcision and naming, they protest Elizabeth's suggestion that the child should be named John, wonder at the events

Zechariah (62-3) requests a tablet (wood with wax) ^{↳ magic slate} and names the child John – (God fulfills his promises, God keeps his word)

- There has been a change in Zech →
- “Let us take heed that affliction does us good”
 - Zech grew in faith, obedience
 - Zech didn't become bitter, resist the discipline of God in this matter
 - **What affliction are you facing at the start of this New Year? Take heed that it does you good!**

The larger group of people including neighbours and people of the hill country (65-6) wondered and feared and spread the news, as well as storing these things in their hearts (reflecting deeply)

God (66) has actions as well, opening of Zechariah's mouth and loosening his tongue – (God fulfills his promises, God keeps his word)

The actions that come in quick succession primarily point to the wonderful truth of God keeping his word and fulfilling his promises!

John the Baptist (80) “And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.” – God fulfills his promises, God keeps his word

Words

Elizabeth (60) “No; he shall be called John.” Elizabeth is obedient – (God fulfills his promises, God keeps his word)

Neighbours and Relatives (61) “None of your relatives is called by this name.” – Obedience in the face of social custom??????

Zechariah (64) blessed God – *likely something other than the hymn that follows*

- Development of faith in the faithful – an old man who kept growing in the Lord
- I love this: saints who are advanced in years who keep growing
- Request for a meeting because this older saint had a few questions – email me the questions so I can be prepared – “I’d like to talk about infant baptism, Israel, Ezekiel 28: 12-19, Mathew 28:9, John 20:17, 12 tribes, Isaiah 65:20, Daniel 8:20-21 and 9:26, and Mathew 16:19.
- **Seniors, you need to keep growing. And we need you to keep growing!**

The larger group of people including neighbours and people of the hill country (65) “What then will this child be?”

- the next section, Zechariah’s hymn, answers that question
- it is also the Words of God, he too had actions and words – prophet and prophecies: “PROPHET – In the Old Testament, one who received divine revelation and communicated it, often with the preface “Thus says the LORD.

The overarching idea in the first section of this passage, when we consider the actions and words of all involved, is clearly that God fulfills his promises, he keeps his word.

The Praise and Prophecy of Zechariah – 1:67-79

These words of prophecy are spoken by Zechariah, but he was “filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied” meaning they were God’s words that he spoke. God’s word has several functions.

- First, God's word is active and powerful in creation; he speaks the world into existence (Gen. 1:3ff, Ps. 33:6, 9; 147:15-18; 148:5-6).
- Second, God's word reveals. God speaks to communicate his existence, character, and purposes and to guide his people in his ways (Gen. 3:8-19, 12:1; 15:1; 22:11; Ps. 119:9, 25, 28, 65, 107, 160, 169, 170; Isa. 9:8; Jer. 1:4; Ezek. 33:7; Amos 3:1,8).
- Third, God's word redeems. And God saves, delivers, and judges through his Word (Isa. 55:11; cf. Ps. 29:3ff; 107:20).

In this case, God’s words spoken through Zechariah reveal.

We see in this hymn⁶⁸ praise^f andⁿ prophecy^u, all inspired by the Holy Spirit:

Praise – 68-75

⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

- Zechariah begins with praise; this has the format of a hymn of praise similar to what we saw in the Psalms

for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
 in the house of his servant David,

- Zechariah begins by focusing on God's visitation in Messianic redemption; God will visit through the Messiah for the purpose of saving
- God "visits" his people for two reasons: to judge and to act graciously, in this case...the birth of John and Jesus...Zechariah focuses on the gracious act of God...*but God's visitation in the Messiah will have a judgment side to it as well*
- Zechariah clearly has in mind a salvation that is both political and spiritual; what we understand now is that these two phases of the Messianic deliverance correspond with the two comings of Christ; his first coming brought spiritual deliverance and his second coming will bring political deliverance
- The Messiah is clearly a person of power and strength; he is a horn of salvation
 - **Deuteronomy 33:17 ESV** [Moses's blessing, speaking of Joseph] A firstborn bull—he has majesty, and his horns are the horns of a wild ox; with them he shall gore the peoples, all of them, to the ends of the earth; -- the Messiah is strong and powerful
 - The connection to David makes it clear that the Messiah is in view

⁷⁰as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

- We see here again the idea of God fulfilling his promises, keeping his word – this was prophesied before

⁷¹that we should be saved from our enemies
 and from the hand of all who hate us;

- Biblical salvation is physical preservation, deliverance of a nation, spiritual deliverance of salvation – Zechariah would be thinking of all these things, we understand they will all come to pass in Christ

⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,

- Showing mercy is God’s loyal, faithful, gracious love demonstrated as he acts on behalf of his people
- God’s remembering here is more than a cognitive exercise; it’s his active bringing about of his word of promise

⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham,

God is keeping his word to Abraham; what was his promise?

- **Genesis 12:1-3 ESV** ¹Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I 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.”
 - I will make you into a great nation
 - I will bless you
 - I will make your name great
 - I will bless those who bless you
 - I will curse him who curses you
 - In you all nations will be blessed
- There is a promise to Abraham that, in the time of Zechariah, had not been fulfilled; the promised Saviour would fulfill it: “In you all nations will be blessed”
- GOSPEL Part 1 – if you’re not a believer: it is God’s desire to bless you!

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.

- Deliverance is subordinate to service
- God saves for service!
- A service that has a moral quality to it – holiness righteousness
- **Do we have this perspective in our original salvation?** → "me focused salvation"
- **Do we have this perspective—we are saved to serve—God's gracious deliverance in smaller things?**
 - Health troubles
 - Financial troubles
 - Relational troubles
 - Sin troubles

With these thoughts on service,

The hymn switches gears and moves into its prophetic phase concerning John and Jesus. Zechariah prophesies what God will do through these two contemporaries.

Prophecy – 76-79

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

- John will be a prophet; he will herald the *salvation* of God and the *Saviour* from God
- John will prepare people for what God will do through the Messiah
- NT confirms John is a forerunner to Jesus; a preacher of repentance and forgiveness

○ **Mark 1:1-4 ESV**

¹The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,

³the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

⁴John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

This forgiveness of sins is where the hymn goes next... John will prepare the way so Jesus can do a work of forgiveness
⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people
 in the forgiveness of their sins,

- The key spiritual operation of both the preparing prophet and the fulfilling Messiah falls within the sphere of forgiveness of sins
- This is how God would fulfill the promise to Abraham to bless the whole world — *through Christ he will do a work of forgiveness*
- This is the heart of the gospel: **1 Corinthians 15:3 ESV** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,
- **GOSPEL – this is how God fulfills his blessing to the world**
- **Through the forgiveness of sins, God in Christ:**
 - **Absorbs the wrath of God that our sins justly deserve**
 - **Redeems from slavery to sin and a life lived in futility**
 - **Declares us righteous with the righteousness of Christ**
 - **Warrants our adoption into God’s family**

What’s the motivation behind the work of forgiveness?
⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God,

Again, mercy: mercy characterizes the entire plan of God

another description of the Saviour's work:

whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high

⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

- The rising sun is Messiah = he is the coming light: I am the light of the world
- The light is for those who walk in darkness, in the shadow of death

- **Isaiah 9:2-7 ESV**

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.
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

This passage in Isaiah, and the hymn of Zechariah, demonstrate that the coming of John prepares for the coming of Christ—both of which are evidence of God keeping his word and fulfilling his promises—which brings a blessing to the world and light and peace to the world. Jesus does this through his work on the cross which accomplished for us the forgiveness of our sins. We are about to celebrate that at the Lord's Table in a few moments.

⇒ We have already looked at some practical applications from this passage:
 ⇒ But perhaps the most important application...

- ① Take heed your affliction does you good!
- ② Keep growing!
- ③ Understand God desires to bless
- ④ Have the perspective that we are saved to serve
- ⑤ Believe that the central work of Christ is forgiveness

But the question still remains, how do we avail ourselves of the blessing of Abraham and the forgiveness of sins?

We see how in Acts 3:25-26 ESV: You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

"Repentance" - for those who have never repented
 - for those who have

God keeps his word, and has kept his word. The most glorious evidence of this is seen in the salvation he brings through Jesus Christ. That salvation is a blessing to the world, and it comes, at its very core, as forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ.

This brings us to our celebration of this blessing of forgiveness, the Lord's Table