

## Songs of Advent: The Messenger and Messiah

Luke 1:67-79

If you think 2020 has been unique, think about the year that Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, had before John was born. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth had never been able to have children and they had both grown older and well beyond the point where their bodies were capable of producing children. They had sort of come to terms with this because they really didn't have any other choice.

Zechariah was a priest and he was simply doing his job on his rotation at the temple when all the sudden an angel appeared to him while he was in the temple. Unsettling to say the least. This angel tells you that you and your wife are going to have a child, even in your elderly situation, and that your child is going to be an Elijah like figure and prepare the people for the Lord's arrival. Well, that sounds pretty crazy to you and so you harbor significant doubts. The angel tells you that you will know that this thing will happen because you won't be able to talk until the baby is born. And sure enough, you leave the temple and can't even communicate to people about the angel.

Sure enough, your elderly wife gets pregnant and soon your relative Mary, much younger, comes to visit you with news that she is pregnant and still a virgin. An angel has visited her as well and promised that her child will sit on the throne of David. It's obvious to you that God is on the move again and it's been a while. 400 years to be exact and the situation is not good for your people, the nation of Israel. The temple was destroyed almost 600 years earlier when Babylon invaded, and has since been rebuilt, but God's glorious presence never re-entered the Temple. It's sort of like having a body with no heart. Besides that, your people are under the occupation of a foreign power, the Roman Empire. The land promised to you seems to be defiled by these invaders and you long to have God's presence among your people and to be free from Roman occupation.

After 9 months Elizabeth gives birth to a beautiful baby boy. 8 days after his birth, according to the law, you take him to have him circumcised and name him John. When this happens your ability to talk comes back and you burst into an emotional and hopeful song because you KNOW God is doing something. What is He doing? He's working the fulfillment of His covenant promises to His people and

bringing deliverance and he's going to do it through your son, and Mary's baby boy. And we're going to spend the next few minutes looking at Zechariah's song of praise to God for all He will do through these two babies and how their lives are instrumental to God's saving purposes for His people. So, in this second song of advent we will see **2 People Crucial for God's Coming Deliverance**

### **1. A Powerful and Promised Messiah (vv. 68-75)**

I want you to notice that Zechariah has the same experience as his wife when Mary came to visit her. Look back to 1:41. Here we find Zechariah filled with the Spirit and proclaiming prophecy. He's looking to the future and announcing what God will do. In many ways you could say that we should read the rest of the book of Luke through this lens. This song or prophecy has often been called the Benedictus because of the very first word in verse 68. In Latin that word is Benedictus and clearly all of this is meant to praise and honor God for what He will do.

Zechariah will get to his own son and the role he plays, but he begins with a focus on God's national purposes. Look at the rest of verse 68. I mentioned a few minutes ago that at this point in Israel's history God had been silent for 400 years. No prophetic word, no presence in the Temple, no miracles, nothing. The people were under the dominion of a pagan people and longed for God to show up and act. Well, Zechariah sees God as acting through these two men. He will visit and redeem His people.

When the Bible uses this language of God "visiting" His people it can either be visiting to judge or visiting to bless. This is how Joseph describes what God will do in rescuing the nation from Egypt. Listen to Genesis 50:24. Here it's quite clear that God will show up to redeem His people.

This is the expectation, but what does this mean? Is Zechariah describing a political redemption, much like when God brought Israel out of Egypt, or is he describing a spiritual redemption, much as we often think of God's deliverance in our lives? I would say that the Lord Jesus brings both and that Zechariah expects both, but through the rest of the book of Luke and into Acts we understand that the primary redemption brought through God's visitation is a spiritual redemption. This spiritual redemption will ultimately lead to political. Zechariah

could not have known all of these details, but he knows how this redemption will come and it will come through a powerful Messiah. Look at verse 69.

When you think of a horn on an ox or a buffalo, that horn is a weapon that is used against the enemy. Zechariah expects God to raise up a powerful weapon from the house of David as God has promised. Listen to a couple of passages that speak to this promise. Psalm 132:13-18 and Jeremiah 23:5-6.

Now, I want you to follow the logic of what Zechariah is expecting here and that he lays out in verses 69-75. His hopes come in 4 parts.

God will visit and redeem His people by raising up a horn of salvation. We've seen this in verses 68-69.

He has done this according to His promises in the OT. Look at the rest of verse 69-70, and verses 72-73.

This horn of salvation will deliver the people from their enemies, both political and spiritual. Look at verses 71 and 74a.

And, the goal of this deliverance is found in the rest of verse 74 and verse 75. In the OT God delivers His people from their enemies so they can worship and serve Him. This is the end game of His redemption and deliverance. Now, what is helpful here is that the word "serve" is the same word used of priestly service before the Lord. Listen to Exodus 3:12. And Israel's entire purpose for existence was to be a kingdom of priests, those who would worship the Lord by serving Him, and represent Him to the world. Listen again to Ex. 19:4-6.

I want you to make careful note of that pattern. Redemption has its goal and outcome as service, which means the worship of the Lord. We are redeemed in order to serve God. And, service of the Lord is always tied to obedience to His commands. God placed Adam and Eve in the garden and told them to "serve" Him, same priestly idea, by obeying His commands. We cannot separate worship and obedience. One author put it this way: *"The essence of worship is responsiveness to God's demands."* - Darrell Bock

Notice the specific description of this service here in verse 75. It is in "holiness and righteousness". This includes a pure heart, holiness, and the outward actions of righteousness. Worship is the total person. It's not just having a happy heart

that feels nice about God. It's a pure heart and right actions. This worship of service is best described by Romans 12:1-2. Notice, that we are to have our minds transformed, but we are to present our bodies to God. Internal motives, loves, and affections, as well as bodily actions, disciplines, and habits.

I have to tell you that I am concerned that very many Christians do not see the connection between redemption and this service of worship. They live as if they can receive the redemption offered in Christ and then continue to offer their bodies and minds to the world. When the true and powerful Messiah delivers you from your enemies He does not allow you to run right back into slavery.

So, we've seen the first person who is crucial to God's deliverance is the powerful and promised Messiah. Now Zechariah turns to praise God for the gift of His son and the role he will play in God's unfolding plan.

## **2. A Prophetic and Preparatory Messenger (vv. 76-79)**

The deliverance God is bringing through His visitation will bring about political results, but not in the timing and the way many imagine. Instead, it will be announced through the prophetic ministry of Zechariah's son, John. He will play a key biblical role in God's visitation. Listen to Jesus's own words regarding John later in the gospel of Luke. Luke 7:24-28.

Jesus says this because of passages like Isaiah 40:1-3 and Malachi 3:1. So, how exactly will John prepare the people for God's arrival? Will it be through organizing a political party and gathering soldiers to fight against Roman occupation? Not exactly. Look at verse 77.

John's ministry will be answering this question: What sort of deliverance will this be? What sort of redemption? It will be a redemption from the domination of sin and death. It will be a deliverance brought about through the forgiveness of sins as the rest of verse 77 says.

Zechariah understands John's ministry to be a preparation for the reception of the New Covenant. This covenant was promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and I want you to listen to what God says He will do. The entire covenant is built on the work of forgiveness, as the end of verse 34 says. In fact, transformation of heart comes because of the knowledge of forgiveness of sins.

The problem that Israel faced through the OT was their own sin. They were constantly under oppression from enemies because they were sinful. This is exactly what God told them would happen in Deuteronomy and it unfolded time and again in the OT. Throughout the book of Judges, and then under the Kings to the point of being exiled from the land. The problem was their sinful idolatry, which flowed from their twisted hearts. They had no chance for deliverance from political enemies until they were freed from their own idolatry.

John's ministry was to prepare people to receive that forgiveness through repentance and faith. And this message of forgiveness through repentance and faith is the message of the gospel that has been made available through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. Listen to these verses as the message of Jesus is announced in the book of Acts. Acts 2:38; 5:30-31 and Paul tells us that God sent him to the Gentiles to proclaim this same message. Listen to Acts 26:18.

This forgiveness is according to God's mercy and will happen as God visits us after John has prepared the way. Look at verse 78.

The same language used in verse 68 is used again here and is describing the arrival of Messiah. But this time it's described as a sunrise. Why? Our family has been watching a survival show recently where they drop 10 guys off in the wilderness with a few items and see who can survive the longest. There's one part in the show where it's been rainy, cold, and cloudy for days and the men remaining are suffering emotionally and mentally because of the darkness and cold. After a long night the morning breaks clear and the sun comes up to a beautiful day. The reaction of the men is astounding. They are exuberant. They go out to just stand in the sun for a time and enjoy the light and warmth.

It's a magnificent picture of the coming of Christ to a dark and dying world. Look at verse 78-79. The world was sitting in darkness and Zechariah is saying that from his vantage point the horizon is getting pink and it's going to be a gorgeous day. All we could do before was sit in the darkness, but now we can see and he gives guidance. Picture a caravan of travelers getting up to a bright sunrise and being able to see where they are headed. And where will this Messiah leads us? The way of peace, shalom. We will get into that more next time with our next song.

But, the light has dawned and now we can see. The darkness has been exposed and our sins can be forgiven through this powerful Messiah. Through these two

babies the message of mercy and grace has been initiated and I hope will lead you to the same reaction as Zechariah, rejoicing with great joy. Let's pray.