

A Bible Lesson on Luke 1:57-80 (ESV¹)

Luke 1:57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.

58And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

"the Lord had shown great mercy to her" Indeed. The child is well, this old woman comes through pregnancy and birth well, and that doesn't begin to tell the whole story. This little boy is going to be herald of God's Messiah, the One that was promised in Genesis and the Jews have longed for and prayed for hundreds of years.

59And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father,

There is a real neighborhood party going on here, complete with musicians and punch and cake and ceremonial circumcision. The birth of any male child was an occasion for celebration. All the more so in these amazing circumstances. The neighbors assume that (perhaps in keeping with the default practice of the day) the baby will be named for his father. The phrase rendered "they would have called him Zechariah" by the ESV might be translated "they were calling the child Zechariah." But Elizabeth corrects them. The neighbors won't name this kid, his father won't name this kid ... God has already named him!

60but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John."

61And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name."

This is a legitimate puzzle to the people in the crowd. They know the families and have no idea where this name is coming from. It seems that Zechariah and Elizabeth have been private about what happened in the temple. They've not been on the talk show circuit blabbing about their spiritual experiences, but rather waiting with joy to see what God will do.

62And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called.

It's either that Zechariah was not only dumb, but also deaf from his encounter with Gabriel in the temple, or these folks have forgotten that inability to speak doesn't imply inability to hear and understand.

63And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered.

This statement is emphatic. This is not a matter that is yet to be decided. It is not still up for grabs. The kid *is* John. Though the neighbors don't know it, that's the name the boy had from before his conception.

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

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The last thing that had come out of Zechariah's mouth before this was expression of doubt. Now, in wonderful contrast, there is expression of praise to God who has wonderfully blessed him and his wife and is going to bless the nation and all humanity through their son. Zechariah has had 9 months to think about this, and he gets it right with his first words.

65And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea,

66and 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.

The neighbors are awe-struck. They have sense enough to see in these quiet events the hand of the sovereign God of the universe. By human standards these events are subtle. There's been no war or political revolution, no economic failure, no plague, not even a big evangelistic campaign with lots of people walking the aisles or any such thing. This has been quiet, but stunningly profound, absolutely earth-shaking. The whole of the Christmas account has this character. The whole of the Gospel has this character. If we judge the work of God by our human standards of what must matter, we will consistently have it wrong regarding what is important.

67And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

It has been over 400 years since there's been a prophet in Israel. But now Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesies. As with the Magnificat, virtually every single phrase of this is Old Testament language/quote. There's again a lesson here. Zechariah is not making it up as he goes along. He's speaking Bible words about Bible themes. Just a few of the OT echoes in "the Benedictus"/"Zechariah's song" are indicated below. Again, these are the first words out of the mouth of this saint since his foolish words of doubt over 9 months before. This is better! Much, much better!

68"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people

Psalm 41:13 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.

Exodus 4:31 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.

Psalm 111:9 He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!

Luke 1:69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,

Psalm 18:2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

See **2 Samuel 7** regarding the "house of David."

Zechariah sees pretty clearly that John is going to herald Messiah's coming. The Messiah, son of David is on the way.

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

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

Psalm 18:17 He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me.

Luke 1:72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,

Ruth 1:8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

Micah 7:20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

Psalm 105:8 He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,

⁹the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac,

Zechariah has spent 9 months meditating on the reliability of the promises of God, and now rejoices in the most basic promise of deliverance announced already in **Genesis 3** and given detail in the Old Testament covenants.

Luke 1:73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us

Micah 7:20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

Luke 1:74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,

Psalm 97:10 O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Joshua 24:14 "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

Luke 1:75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Isaiah 38:20 The LORD will save me, and we will play my music on stringed instruments all the days of our lives, at the house of the LORD.

Verses 74 and 75 are the crux of the matter of deliverance from the hand of the enemies of Israel. God's intervention on behalf of His people is to the end that they are free to serve Him properly. Always and always, in the history of Israel and of the New Testament church, God has been at work to call and preserve a people who will serve Him and show forth His glory, to call and preserve a people who will worship Him rightly.

Zechariah next turns and addresses the infant.

Luke 1:76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

Malachi 4:5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Malachi 3:1 "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.

Luke 1:77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,

Jeremiah 31:34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Luke 1:78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high

Malachi 4:2 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.

Luke 1:79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Psalm 107:10 Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons,

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

Isaiah 42:7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Isaiah 58:8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

To the Hebrew mind, peace is more than just freedom from trouble. It is all that makes for man's highest good. It is all things set right and in order under the rule and benevolent reign of God.

Luke 1:80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.