

The Benedictus – Zechariah’s Song

Luke 1:68-79

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Have you ever wondered what Zechariah’s journal entry must have been like after the birth of John? I wonder if it went something like this –

“When the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, I stayed close to her, silently praying. My voice had been gone for months, ever since I doubted the angel’s promise that we would have a son. Yet hope filled our home, and when Elizabeth delivered the child, my heart overflowed with praise I could not speak.

Our neighbors and relatives rejoiced with us, amazed that the Lord had shown such mercy in our old age. Eight days later, we gathered for the child’s circumcision. Everyone assumed he would carry my name, as tradition expected. But Elizabeth spoke firmly, “No. He shall be called John.” Confusion rippled through the room, and they turned to me, motioning for my decision.

I asked for a writing tablet and wrote clearly: **His name is John.** Instantly, my tongue was freed. My voice returned without hesitation, and I began blessing God with all my strength. Those around us were filled with awe, sensing that God was moving.

The Holy Spirit came upon me, and words rose within me like fire: **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people.** The ancient promises were alive again—God was raising salvation for His people, remembering His covenant with Abraham, delivering us so we could serve Him without fear.

I looked at our newborn son and spoke: **You will be the prophet of the Most High, preparing the Lord’s way, giving His people knowledge of salvation and forgiveness.** Truly, the sunrise from on high was near.”

Zechariah, like so many other Israelites, had been waiting for generations for God to make good on his promise to bring forth the Messiah, and now, it is all happening. Zechariah is in the middle of God’s plan, and it is a plan for humanity to experience peace. From the beginning, **God has purposed for us to experience true peace.**

1. Don't forget to remember.

a. Reminder: What is Advent?

- i. From Pastor Taylor last week: A season of intentional remembering and expecting. Of looking backward, and looking forward. Remembering God's faithfulness in the past, and expecting God's faithfulness in the future.
- ii. We remember when God fulfilled his promise to send the Messiah, and we look forward to when God will send his son again. We look back in several ways: We look back to God's faithfulness in our own lives. We ask, "How has God been faithful to me personally in the past?" We look back to God's faithfulness in the New Testament. We ask, "How has God been faithful to His bride, the Church?" We look all the way back to God's faithfulness in the Old Testament. We ask, "How was God faithful to his chosen people, the Israelites?"
- iii. So it's a season of rich remembering. And it's also a season of deep, expectant, hope-filled longing. Christians long for Christ's second coming. We really live in the time between two advents, or what some people call the "already but not yet." The first advent is what we celebrate every Christmas. The birth of Jesus, in Bethlehem, in a manger, Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, all that. What has already happened. The second advent is described in the book of Revelation, when Jesus will return. What has not yet happened. All of it kind of stacks on top of each other. The Old Testament sacrifices and the roles of the prophets, priests, and kings were all pointing forward to Jesus. And Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection are all pointing forward to His return. And in that space between His resurrection and His return, is where we are. We live in the space between. The already, but the not yet.

1. And that's what Advent is all about. We look back to God's clear faithfulness in the past, and we look forward to God's expected faithfulness in the future.¹

- b. How does Zechariah know? --> He remembered the promises of God. He was looking and expecting.
 - i. What does God do? --> He remembers.
 1. His faith is remarkable; however, it is not perfect.
 2. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."
 3. 18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And the angel answered him, "I am

¹ Taylor Mugge – Advents 2025 #1 – Mary's Song - <https://ccames.churchcenter.com/episodes/576687>

Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 **And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.**"²

- ii. One of the immense and beautiful truths of Advent is that God remembered his long-standing promise.

2. A Holy Covenant

- a. So what exactly did God remember to bring to fruition? --> His promise of a holy covenant with humanity.
 - i. Zechariah remembers all of the prophecies of old. – “as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old”
 - ii. Inspired by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:67), Zechariah poetically forecasts the prophetic mission of his son, John the Baptist, in parallel terms of “salvation” and “forgiveness”: “to give knowledge of salvation [sōtēria] to his people by the forgiveness [aphesis] of sins” (Lk 1:77). The wider context of Zechariah’s Benedictus imagines such salvation/forgiveness as sociopolitical liberation from oppressive enemies, freeing God’s people to serve their covenantal Lord “without fear” (Lk 1:71–75).³
 - iii. **Co-laboring with God - The second clause, “to enable us to serve him without fear,” is the result of the first.** God rescues his covenant people so they can fulfill their covenant and serve him. For Zechariah as a priest, serving God would refer to the priestly duties in the temple and among the Jewish people. Here it reaches beyond that to the service of God (Greek *latreuō*) in general. “Enable” is *tou dounai* (to give, grant); when God rescues his people, he grants them the privilege of serving him. In this way, service for the Lord is another spiritual gift. In another way, every aspect of our lives can be viewed as serving him.⁴

b. What is a covenant?

i. Simply – It is a partnership. / A mutually binding relationship.

- 1. Covenant refers to the act of God in freely establishing a mutually binding relationship with humankind. Through the covenant God bestows blessings on humans in conditional and unconditional terms. Conditionally, God blesses humans as they obey the terms of the covenant. Unconditionally, God bestows blessings on humans regardless of their obedience or disobedience to the terms of the covenant. God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.

²The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 1:14–20.

³ F. S. Spencer, “Forgiveness of Sins,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Second Edition, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 286.

⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, ed. Jeffrey Reimer, Elliot Ritzema, and Danielle Thevenaz, Awa Sarah, *Osborne New Testament Commentaries* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 57.

But above all, God has fulfilled these covenants and has inaugurated the New Covenant in Christ, which is for all people who trust in him (Heb 9:15, 27–28). Covenant theology is the system of theology that centers on God as a covenant-making God and sees in the history of creation two great covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Covenant theology asserts that prior to the Fall God made a covenant of works with Adam as the representative of all humankind. In response to Adam's disobedience God established a new covenant through the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Those who place their faith in Christ come under the benefits of this new covenant of grace.⁵

c. What were the previous covenants?

- i. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Priestly (some scholars add this one), and David. - All of these covenants would fail, not because God would fail, but because humanity would fail.
- ii. God would make one final covenant, but this time it would be between himself and his Son. (I.e., Made exclusively with himself.) There would now be no way for the covenant to fail or fall short.
- iii. Jesus speaks of this last covenant at the last supper. --> "This is a new covenant..."
 1. Luke 22:19-20 - **"And he took bread, and when he had 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.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"**⁶

d. Key question – If God has restored you not just for eternity, but for a life of covenant, what does that mean for your here and now?

- i. What does partnering with God look like in the everyday things of your life? Or, consider it this way – What does cooperating with God to partner in God's plans for your everyday life look like?
 1. How does this impact your work and relationships at work?
 2. How does this impact your home life and relationships within your family unit?
 3. How does this impact the neighborhood that you live in and the places that you play or socialize?
 4. How does this impact your inner thought life and the things you believe about yourself?

⁵ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 32.

⁶ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 22:19–20.

3. A people of peace.

- a. Not only is the promise of forgiveness from our sins, but it is for a life of peace. This is a significantly powerful promise that the Jews were waiting for, and it is even more significant when we understand its scope through the lens of the cross.
 - i. We might have expected that Zechariah's song would be all about his little boy. He surprised us by beginning with the Messiah whom God was about to send. But he was very pleased about John, and in this part of his song he prophesies the child's future. **He addresses him directly, and says that he will be called the prophet of the Most High. There had been no prophet among the Jews for centuries, so the words should not be taken too calmly. John would represent a radical departure from what had become customary.** And not only was he to be a prophet, but he was to prepare the Lord's way. He would be forerunner to the Messiah. Specifically he would tell people about the coming of salvation in the forgiveness of their sins. John would not save people. No man could. But he would call people to repentance and tell them about One who could save them.⁷
 - ii. Zechariah finishes his song by dwelling on the coming salvation. It will come through God's tender mercy. The compassion of God is a constant theme of the New Testament. The old priest goes on to speak of salvation in terms of light. The contrast between light and darkness is a natural one, but nonetheless powerful for that. It is possible to understand the Greek as 'the dayspring' and see an unusual name for the Messiah (so RSV mg.; cf. Mal. 4:2; 2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 22:16). But *anatolē* sometimes means 'a shoot' and it is possible to see a reference to the Messiah as the Shoot from Jesse (Isa. 11:1ff.). The word however normally means the 'rising' of the sun or a star, and hence the sun or star itself (RSV's day does not seem to be attested); we should perhaps see the contrast between light and darkness (cf. Isa. 60:1f.). The concluding note is that of peace, that peace of God that calms our hearts and makes us strong to live for God. It 'does not mean merely freedom from trouble; it means all that makes for a man's highest good.'⁸
- b. John & Jesus – Isa. 9:1-2
 - i. **"But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 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."**⁹
 - 1. John is the one who God would use as a prophet to declare the coming of the Messiah.
 - a. cf. Jn. 1:29-30 – **"The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the**

⁷ Leon Morris, Luke: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 97.

⁸ Leon Morris, Luke: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 97–98.

⁹ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 9:1–2.

world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’

2. Jesus is the one who will save his people from their sins.

a. Cf. Matthew 1:21 – **“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**

c. What is peace?

i. A state of wholeness and not just a lack or a ceasing of conflict.

1. **Peace** - As an ethical term, the absence of conflict; the cessation of hostilities; or—based on the Hebrew concept of shalom—the positive condition of personal or communal wholeness, integrity and well-being. In the Christian tradition, the pursuit of peace and the attempt to be an agent of peace are viewed as indispensable aspects of the Christian calling, in keeping with Jesus’ beatitude “blessed are the peacemakers” (Mt 5:9).¹⁰

d. How do we live as a people of peace?

i. **Less fearful** – When I know that God is in control, I can trust him more readily.

ii. **Less anxious** - When I know that God is good, I can rest in my circumstances and his faithfulness.

iii. **Less selfish** - When I know that God is generous, I can be thankful for what God supplies.

iv. **Less angry** - When I know that God is just, I can be self-controlled in my responses and attitudes.

e. With this things in mind let’s again ask – If God has restored you not just for eternity, but for a life of covenant, what does that mean for your here and now?

i. What does partnering with God look like in the everyday things of your life? Or, consider it this way – What does cooperating with God to partner in God’s plans for your everyday life look like?

1. How does this impact your work and relationships at work?

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¹⁰ Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, Pocket Dictionary of Ethics, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 86.