

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**Luke 1:67-79** *And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, <sup>68</sup> "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; <sup>72</sup> to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup> that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. <sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high <sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

If you're a parent, do you remember that day in the doctor's office when you first found out? Do you remember the excited anticipation as the technician used the high-tech machinery to capture all the images and measurements on the screen? Do you remember anxiously waiting what felt like hours for the doctor to come into the room and to go over the results? And do you remember how you first felt when the doctor said those words, "Congratulations! Your child is going to be an insurance adjuster!"

Ok. Obviously, there are things the doctor can tell you about your child, but what they will do for a career is not one of them. But we'd all be lying if we said we didn't wonder about such things. It's very natural to think about your young children, wondering what they're going to be when they grow up, wondering what type of accomplishments they'll have on their resumes. Maybe, sometimes, we even want to project ourselves onto our children's futures. I've always said that I don't care what my children do when they get older, as long as they all play baseball and then become pastors, you know, the rest—totally up to them!

In our text this morning, we read the perspective of a parent who actually did know exactly what his child would be when he grew up. Here was his son, only eight days old, and Zechariah was able to see with absolute clarity what his son's life would be all about. But he wasn't projecting himself on the boy, he wasn't trying to live vicariously through him or anything like that. Rather, he recognized that it was God who had selected his son's life for him. And it was on the basis of this fact that Zechariah, brand new father, broke forth in song after the birth of his child. And yet, even though he sang about his child, that's not who this song was about, not really. The theme we'll be considering today is:

## **The Song of Zechariah**

It's all about Christ.

A few Wednesdays ago we considered the Silence of Zechariah. If you missed that service, perhaps you can recall what his silence was all about anyway. There Zechariah had been, working in the Temple before the Lord offering incense, when an angel appeared to him and told him, "**Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and**

***you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.***” (Luke 1:13-15) And then of course, Zechariah doubted whether this could be the case, since he and his wife were both old, and she barren at that—unable to conceive a child. And so the angel silenced Zechariah since he did not believe the message from the Lord, and then there were what I imagine were forty or so long weeks of silence, a good amount of time for the expectant father to re-consider his response.

Evidently, he really took the words of the angel to heart during his months of discipline, for in the verses leading up to our text, we find the parents getting their son circumcised at eight days old, as the law dictated should take place. At a Jewish boy’s circumcision, he would also receive his name, and the friends and family that had gathered for the occasion assumed the boy would be named “Zechariah” after his father. But Elizabeth said, ***“No, he shall be called John.”*** (Luke 1:60) And after some confusion from the crowd, Zechariah used a writing implement to reinforce the same, ***“His name is John.”*** (John 1:63)

We see Zechariah putting a lot more stock in the words of the angel after all this time. You have to imagine that at some point during those months of the pregnancy, Zechariah explained everything to his wife Elizabeth, for we see that she too is adamant that the child’s name is what God had declared it to be. After this, God looses Zechariah’s tongue, he’s suddenly able to speak once more, and what does he do but praise God with this song in our text. And in this song he reveals to the assembly that he knows a few things about his son that most parents wouldn’t normally be able to know.

For instance, they knew what John’s job would be. They knew he would be ***“the prophet of the Most High.”*** They knew he would have the special task of preparing the way before the Savior arrived. But there were some details about their son’s life that I’m sure they did not know, and given their advanced age, perhaps they died not knowing.

So let’s imagine for a second, that it was Zechariah and Elizabeth sitting in that doctor’s office that I described earlier. Let’s imagine the doctor could see not only what John would become, but also some of the other peculiar details about his life. Picture the doctor coming in with his clipboard in hand, a concerned look spread across his face as he tells the anxious parents, “Well, it looks like your son is going to be the forerunner of the Messiah, so that’s good. But there are a few abnormalities here. For one thing, it looks like he’s going to be a loner, living out in the wilderness by himself. I’m concerned about his diet too, my chart says he’s going to going to eat a lot of bugs surviving off locusts and wild honey. And, I’m sorry to say it, but I can even see how he’s going to die. It says here he’s going to be arrested, thrown in prison, and then have his head chopped off by a demented ruler just so he can present your son’s head on a silver platter to his step-daughter. He will die unmarried, you will have no grandchildren. I’m very sorry, we thought out to know.”

What would Zechariah and Elizabeth’s reaction be to that type of foreknowledge? Would they have been distressed to learn all of this about their precious little boy? No. I don’t think they would have been. And here’s why. They knew that everything that had to do with the life of their son, in all of its aspects, was intimately related to the very One whom He had been sent to proclaim. This much had been revealed to them: their son’s life—it was all about Christ.

What was the source of joy in Zechariah's song? Notice, his joy wasn't really about *his* son; he burst forth in this song of joy over the Son of God, his Savior. The first words from his lips are, ***"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old."***

The description used there with the ***"horn of salvation,"*** he's evoking the imagery of a ram with its powerful horns. Think of the Dodge Ram commercials, "Ram Tough." This picture of power and strength—that's what Christ Jesus came with. He came with the power of God to salvation, to release the people of this world from their shackles of sin, and to deliver them as the spoils of war to His Father in heaven.

And the beautiful thing about this song—Zechariah speaks in the past tense as though it's all been accomplished already. ***"As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old,"*** Zechariah says. All that God has promised, it has come to pass! He proclaims that God has performed ***"the mercy promised to our fathers and [remembered] His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham."*** He's speaking of God's promise to Abraham that in his offspring, all the families of the earth would be blessed. (cf. Genesis 22:18)

Through this one offspring, namely Jesus, Zechariah declares victory. He says we have been ***"Delivered from the hand of our enemies."*** There are several words in Greek to describe an enemy, but I don't think it's any coincidence that the word used here is essentially the same as God had proclaimed in the garden of Eden, when He declared, ***"I will put enmity between you* (speaking to the devil) ***and the woman."*** (Genesis 3:15) We have had an enemy since the fall into sin, the devil. We may be convinced at times that we have various enemies in this world—often those that are close to us but with whom our relationships have become strained. And yet there's really only one enemy. That's what Paul's speaking of in his letter to the Ephesians, when he says, ***"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*** (Ephesians 6:12) Yes, we have a real enemy, the devil, who *is* powerful, and yet the offspring of Abraham had come and crushed the devil's power and might, delivering us once and for all from death. Zechariah's really declaring the very same truths which we'll be singing about come Easter, ***"The strife is over, the battle done; Now is the Victor's triumph won; Now be the song of praise begun."*****

And yet, the battle hadn't been won just yet, had it? That child in Zechariah's arms was only eight days old which, knowing the chronology of these events, means that Jesus wouldn't even be born for another six months. But Zechariah knows that his baby boy—his life was tied inseparably to His Savior's. His son would be ***"the prophet of the Most High."*** He would ***"go before the Lord to prepare His ways."*** Which meant, the Christ was coming. He was coming with Zechariah's salvation in hand. Though Christ's death and Easter resurrection wouldn't take place for another thirty-three years or so, once the angel announced the Savior's arrival, God was already declaring victory.

Just looking at these events from a very human perspective, it really is remarkable that Zechariah chose these words as his first words post-silence. If it were you, what might have been the first words

coming from your mouths? I can imagine a few things I would have wanted to say. Maybe set the record straight on a few things. “Maybe now you’ll stop constantly putting words in my mouth, Elizabeth.” But those weren’t the most pressing issues on Zechariah’s mind, not by a longshot. He says in the last few verses, **“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 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”** What deep darkness Zechariah had been in during those nine months. Discipline straight from the hand of God, because Zechariah, a priest of the Lord had failed to believe. Why couldn’t he have rejoiced in song all those months ago?

Yet the Lord had released him. Zechariah didn’t have to think any longer about “coulda, shoulda, woulda,” because He knew what *the Lord* had done. GOD had shown *him* mercy, the Lord had forgiven him of even *these* sins. After all these months, the Lord looked upon Zechariah and gave him peace. He loosened Zechariah’s lips, and Zechariah could do nothing but sing the praises of the One who had delivered him.

We can see how intensely personal the words of this song must have been to Zechariah. He felt the weight of his sin, and he also had been given the very personal assurance of his release from his sin’s guilt. After all, here was his baby boy, the one foretold by angels, the one prophesied by the Old Testament Prophets, the herald of the Savior God being made flesh and the assurance that all of God’s promises were now coming to pass. But all of this joy and confidence from the lips of Zechariah, it’s not just for him. And we repeat them today so that we can be reassured of this one simple fact: that just as John’s life was intimately related to the one whom he’d been sent to proclaim, so also are our lives.

We may not be forerunners like John; we are after-runners, able to proclaim everything that God has already done for us in Christ Jesus. Everything about John is connected to Christ, and in our baptisms, everything in us is now connected to Christ as well. For **“we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”** (Romans 6:5) We have been connected to that life, that death, that resurrection. We have been washed clean of our guilt. We have been released from sins deep darkness. We have been adopted as God’s sons and daughters. And we have been given God’s promise, so that when we ask the *future* question—“What’s going to happen in the future?”—when we ask that question about ourselves, our children, even our parents, we do not need to be afraid of the answer. For God has visited us and redeemed us, His people.

Just like this song of Zechariah which is entirely free of any fear or any doubt, so we can live having the same comfort with confident joy. For in Christ, all of your life belongs to Him. That’s both your life in the present-now, and your life in the hereafter-eternity. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

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