

## **The Prophecy of Zechariah**

**December 10, 2017**

### **Luke 1:67-80**

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. 72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being rescued from the hands 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 by the forgiveness of their sins. 78 By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, 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 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

Our journey through the Bible continues. The angel Gabriel visited Zechariah and announced the birth of his son John and told him that his son would be the forerunner to Christ. Then the angel Gabriel visited Mary and announced the birth of her son Jesus and told her that he would be known as the Son of God. The two mothers meet and Elizabeth has her prophecy and Mary offers praise and thanksgiving to God. Then there is the birth of John and today we have the prophecy of Zechariah.

The Scripture story is this. When John is born, his father Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and begins to speak. Zechariah recognizes that the credit goes to God for all the blessings bestowed upon us. God is about to do a big favor for the people by offering us a means of redemption. Zechariah knows that these events are part of the advent of the Savior. He connects what is happening to the scriptures. But he thinks like the people of day - the common perception is the Savior will rescue them from their enemies. He knows that his son John is to be the forerunner to this Savior.

There are several lessons in our Scripture today. There is a lesson on praise. When Elizabeth told Mary that she is chosen to be the mother of the Lord, Mary's response is to praise God. We don't know all of the details, the hardship, the stress, or all of the challenges that she faced. But her focus is not on her hardship; her focus is on praise, to glorify God. Now Zechariah does the same thing; he praises God. We don't know the hardship, or the stress that he went through. But it had to be challenging to be silenced for nine months. Physically he could not complain. Now, he is unburdened and the human tendency is to complain about what he went through. But he does not complain. If it were us, we'd be dying to talk about it "You don't know what I've been through...how hard it was for me ... man what a burden." We would be talking about it nonstop. But Zechariah does not complain about his burdens. He does not make excuses. What he does is praise God. Like Mary his focus is on praise, to glorify God.

There is a lesson on prophecy. There is a lot of prophecy surrounding God's promised Anointed One. Prophecy is the word of God. Prophecy is prediction and proclamation. There are numerous Old Testament prophecies that predict and proclaim the coming Messiah. In the New Testament we have the prophecy of Elizabeth and Zechariah. These are the first prophets since Malachi. The prophecy of Elizabeth tells Mary about the greatness of her child. And Zechariah predicts and proclaims God's word. There are two major points to this prophecy. One, his son

John is a prophet, which is a great honor. Two, John's purpose is an even greater honor - to prepare the way for the Lord.

There is a lesson on significance. We know very little about what goes on behind the scenes. We do not know things like the weather, the name of the town, or the time of the year. We do not know the hardships of daily life or the challenges they faced. We do not know what happened over the next three decades. All we know is that John grew up with strong faith and lived in the wilderness. There is no story of the desert life. There is nothing about the personality characteristics of the protagonists. We don't have that information for two reasons. First of all, the writing material is rare and expensive because they did not have paper back then. Secondly, the information is not essential because all of this is not about them. It would be nice for us to know these details but it is not what is important. The focus is advent - the coming of the Lord. It is about Jesus. What is significant is Jesus; the upcoming birth of the Savior.

It is a lesson on faith. So far we have learned about four people with strong faith. Elizabeth and Zechariah - both of them were righteous before (Luke 1:6). Mary states " here I am, the servant of the Lord" (Luke 1:38). John grew and became strong in spirit (Luke 1:80). Also the author of Luke had strong faith. The Gospel reveals that he supports the testimony of the eyewitnesses. He supports the Old Testament themes about the messenger that is to prepare the way for the Lord. He supports the doctrine of the virgin birth. And he believes in angels and divine intervention.

It is a lesson on value. This is a gift from God. It is the value of that gift that is significant. The value extends beyond the realm of humanity. It is not that **a** gift was given. It is **the** gift that is given. The gift is divine. The gift is God's flesh, blood, and bone. The gift is eternal. The gift is salvation. The gift is love. Compare this gift to any other gift like the gifts that we give and receive on Christmas day and we have to realize that materialism is nothing.

Finally, there is a lesson for us. How special this gift is! Jesus is Lord. The prophetic promise is the covenant - God will save the people. God brings justice to the earth. Justice for all of God's children. Justice from all of the covenant violators. The covenant between God and the people is a love covenant. So, God is coming to the people, not as an agent of fire but as an agent of love. And the people will get to know God. The people will get to know God as loving and caring - as a God of justice. And the people will enter into a righteous relationship with God.