

OPENING THE WAY Sunday School- December 15, 2013

Unifying Topic: ZECHARIAH PROPHECIES ABOUT HIS SON JOHN

Lesson Text

I. The Birth Of John The Baptist (Luke 1:57-58)

II. Zechariah's Song (Luke 1:67-79)

The Main Thought: And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, (Luke 1:76-77, KJV).

Unifying Principle: When a baby is born, parents usually have high expectations for their new child. What hopes and joys do they usually express? Zachariah prophesied that his son, John would prepare the way for the God of justice.

Lesson Aim: To teach students about Zachariah's prophecy concerning the birth of John the Baptist and its significance.

Life aim: To help students understand and appreciate prophecy. Moreover, learning about prophecy also teaches the student that God's Word is trustworthy.

1:57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

1:58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

1:67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

1:68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

1:69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

1:70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

1:71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

1:72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

1:73 The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,

1:74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

1:75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

1:76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

1:77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

1:78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

1:79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

HISTORY:

Chapter 1:42-56 ¹When Elisabeth greeted Mary, she said, "*Blessed are you among women*", (v.42) and then she called her "*the mother of my Lord*" (v.43). Elisabeth's greeting must have strengthened Mary's faith. Since Mary had not said one word to Elizabeth concerning her condition prior to this, it points out the fact that God had revealed this to Elizabeth. It also would have brought double assurance to Mary. Elizabeth said, "As soon as I heard your greeting, my baby became happy and moved within me. *The Lord has blessed you because you believed that he will keep His promise*" (vv.44-45).

Mary's song of praise – typically called "*the Magnificat*" which Mary speaks and it literally means, "*My soul celebrates the Lord.*" Thus, this establishes the praise of Mary. In her testimony of praise, Mary thanks God for six things:

1. She thanks God for He regarded her low estate (1:46-48): God took notice of her.

2. She thanks God for His holiness (1:49): He has done great things for her.

3. She thanks God for His mercy (1:50): His mercy goes on from generation to generation.

4. She thanks God for His power (1:51): He does tremendous things with His power.

5. She thanks God for His sovereignty (1:52-53): He humbles the proud and exalts the lowly.

6. She thanks God for His faithfulness (1:54-55): He has kept all His promises to Israel.

For this, her soul magnified the Lord, and her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. Thus as Mary gave her testimony of praise, she had spent time with Elizabeth staying with her for three months, and then returns home obviously with child (1:56).

LESSON:

¹ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/mary-visits-elizabeth/>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

Luke 1:57-58 The Birth Of John The Baptist

1:57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. By now Elizabeth's waiting time was over. The birth of a child is a significant event and for Zacharias and Elizabeth, the birth of John was much more significant! These are a few things:

- The baby was born as a child of promise demonstrating God's mercy.
- Elizabeth conceived when she was in her old age, beyond child-bearing years, which shows that nothing is impossible with God!
- Zacharias could finally speak again.
- John will be the forerunner to proclaim the coming of the promised Messiah!

1:58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. This child brought all the neighbors and cousins together as they heard the news; as they heard how God showed mercy upon Elizabeth, they rejoiced all the more.

Luke 1:67-79 Zechariah's Song

1:67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,— Zacharias praised God with his first words after months of silence in a song that is often "*the Benedictus*" after its first words in the Latin translation. He was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied the coming of a Savior who would redeem his people and he predicted that his son John would prepare the Messiah's way.

1:68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,—The first part of Zachariah song was a blessing concerning God's Savior. He addressed God as "*the Lord God of Israel.*" Israel was the chosen people of God. And as God's chosen people, Israel had been given (entrusted with) both the Word and promises of God; was to be given the Messiah. Zachariah was predicting how he himself could stand in the future and proclaim what the Messiah had done. The Messiah was the One through whom God visited and redeemed His people. It was God Himself who visited the earth in the Person of the Messiah. In the past, God had been actively involved in the world's affairs. He had sent His Word and His messengers to the world, but now God was becoming personally involved in the world by visiting the world Himself! Zacharias was prophesying but God's promise to Israel has been fulfilled today!

1:69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;—The Messiah was the mighty Savior of David's house. Zacharias says God is sending us a mighty Savior. The phrase "*horn of salvation*" is a reference to Christ. The word "*horn*" throughout the Old Testament was a symbol of strength, power, and might. The Messiah is called "*the horn*" or "*the mighty One of salvation*" because He alone possesses the might, the strength, and the power to save. And also note where the horn or the Messiah was raised up—in the house of His servant David. The Messiah was the horn promised to David, the One who fulfilled the prophecies made concerning David (*There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed Ps. 132:17*). The Messiah appears to re-establish the Davidian kingdom.

1:70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:— God was the One doing the speaking through the mouths of His Holy Prophets since the world began. In Genesis chapter 3:15, God speaks and we see the first prophecy of the Savior. However, in my search, Moses may have been the first prophet, to reference his prophecy to the Savior in Deuteronomy 18:15. Balaam in Num.24:17 spoke of Jesus as a Star out of Jacob..., Isaiah in Is.7:14; 9:6 spoke of His name Immanuel; called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace, and etc.

1:71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;—The Messiah was to save believers from their enemies and from all who hated them.²The Jews had many enemies. In the past, powerful foreign nations attacked and ruled them. Therefore, most Jews would describe 'enemies' in political ways. This was especially true at that time because the Roman soldiers were in their country. However, Christ is interested in saving men from their enemies that wage an endless war against the spirit and enslave men both now and eternally.

1:72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;—The Messiah was the One who fulfilled the promised mercy and the covenant of faith. God promised Abraham that if he would get up and leave his old country and follow Him, then Abraham would receive both the mercy of God and the covenant of faith. The covenant was based on "*the promised seed*", Christ Himself. Thus, Zacharias, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, prophesied that the promised mercy and covenant to Abraham will be in the fulfillment of Jesus.

² <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/luke-lbw.htm>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

1:73 The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,—We have heard of that oath many times (Gen.12:3; 17:4; 22:16-17) and it brings comfort to the offspring of Abraham from generation to generation as God honors His oath.

1:74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,—God has mercy and delivers man through faith that men might serve Him without fear. He does not want men fearing the pain of death and the coming judgment of hell. God wants men to have peace of mind and heart, to feel secure and to know meaning and purpose throughout all of life. Being delivered out of the hand of the enemy frees us to serve Him.

1:75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. ³We can be holy and righteous, because we have taken on His righteousness and holiness. We will no longer be servant to sin, but have the righteousness of Christ to walk in all the days of our life. God will enable men to serve Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives serving; forever.

1:76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;—The second part of Zacharias' prophecy concerned John, his son—to be known as John the Baptist.

1. John was to be the prophet of the Highest!
 - a. There had been no prophet in Israel for some four hundred years. John was to be the first since Malachi.
 - b. Christ was called the Highest, that is the Most High—a title for God. Therefore, the Incarnation of God in Christ was being proclaimed. He is *"God blessed forever."*
 - c. John was called the prophet of the Highest!
2. John was to prepare the Lord's way. He was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. He would be the One who was to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.

To go before the face of the Lord - is the same as to go immediately before one, or to be immediately followed by another. The Lord Jesus, the Messiah, that was about to appear.

1:77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,—John was to proclaim salvation, even forgiveness of sins. Note salvation comes by the forgiveness of sins. Salvation is conditional. Therefore, John's purpose was to call men to salvation; however, one's sins must be forgiven before he could be saved.

1:78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,—One thing for sure, the Messiah was sent through the tender mercy of God. He is the *"Dayspring from on High"*, the morning light, the rising sun who had visited them.

1:79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. The Messiah was sent to give light. To who? **1)** to those who sit in darkness; **2)** to those in the shadow of death; and **3)** to those who need their feet guided into the way of peace.

SUMMARY:

Elizabeth's time had fully come for her son to be born. ⁴When Elizabeth's son was born, her neighbors and relatives, heard how kind the Lord had been to her, and they too were glad (**vv. 57-58**).

It had been many years since God had spoken through the prophets. But now in a special way God opened the lips of Zacharias. ⁵Zacharias prophesied the coming of the Savior who would redeem His people and he predicted that his son John would prepare the Messiah's way. God had opened up his mouth and enabled Zacharias to speak prophetically for He filled him with the Holy Ghost. No wonder Zacharias praised God! (**v. 67**).

1. He gives an exhortation of praise to God (**v. 68a**).
2. He noted the reason God should be praised (**v. 68b**).
3. He described the deliverance for Israel through the Messiah (**vv. 69-75**).
4. He described the ministry John would have (**vv. 76-79**).

To prophesy is not only to be able to foretell coming events only, but to give the mind of God in relation to both the present and the future.

APPLICATION:

Zacharias had prophesied of the coming Messiah and **He** has opened the way for our salvation. Let **Him** in today!

³ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/luke/03.html>

⁴ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/elizabeth-gives-birth-to-john/>

⁵ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/zachariah-prophecies-of-johns-ministry/>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>