

TO GIVE KNOWLEDGE OF SALVATION - LUKE 1:57-80

Daily devotional - also at <https://www.facebook.com/RiversideChurchIowa/>

12-09 - NEW BIRTH - Luke 1:57-61 - Have you ever experienced an incredible promise kept? It can be hard to believe that it really will come true. God's promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth was incredible. But He kept it. Luke recounts the story: *"Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name."* In Genesis 17:12-14 (and 21:4), we read how God instructed Abraham that circumcision of the male was part of His covenant with His people, a sign to show they are set apart for God's purposes, as part of the family of God (see also Leviticus 12:3). *The New Testament counterpart is water baptism, a sign for both male and female believers, who have been circumcised in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, the removal of the heart of stone, hardened against God's character and commands, being replaced with a regenerated heart of flesh, that now beats according to God's word and ways, a new creation by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.* This passage in Luke is where we learn of the custom of naming the male child as part of the rite of circumcision. Isn't it incredible! God had done an amazing thing for Elizabeth, fulfilling His own words regarding the son she bore in their old age. Yet all the relatives and neighbors know better than God. How like us! To think that "we know" instead of listening to God, and hearkening to Him and obeying what HE says. If you are born again from above by the Holy Spirit, your life should be marked by obedience. Trusting what God wrote in His Word, believing and obeying what God says, stepping out in faith to do it. May this be true of you today!

12-10 - NEW NAME - Luke 1:62-66 - Have you ever been ignored? You're standing right there but they talk about you as if you are not. People with disabilities often experience this rude, though unintended discourtesy. This happened to Zechariah, as Luke continues the story of the birth of the forerunner of the Messiah. *"And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and 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."* Not only was the announcement of his birth miraculous, God confirmed His heavenly plans when John was named and set apart for God's holy purposes. For

nine long months, Zechariah had been unable to speak. No doubt he was repentant at his unbelief as he responded to the words of the angel, which should have been so welcome to him, after a lifetime of childlessness. His unbelief left him wordless. Such a contrast to the response of the virgin Mary, for whom a message about a child (out of wedlock) was not welcome to a betrothed teen, yet she humbly believed and received the good news of God's Word, that she was to bear the Son of God, the Savior of the world. And for Zechariah and Elizabeth, they believed what God said about their son, who was to be the messenger of Messiah. And like Zechariah, your new birth in Christ will change your life, and it will be noticed. Zechariah's neighbors feared the Lord, the proper response of awe and reverence before God. Likewise, your obedience to God's Word will be a witness to your neighbors, as you speak His Word of truth and grace. Do so today!

12-11 - RAISED UP - Luke 1: 67-70 - Zechariah spent nine long months being laid low, in a state of muteness, unable to speak because of his unbelief at God's words (Luke 1:18-22). But Zechariah's tongue is now loosed, at the naming of his promised son John, in obedience to God's words. And Zechariah's first words are first in praise of God Himself. Listen to Luke's narrative: *"And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "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."* Zechariah's prophesying is the second of three hymns in Luke 1-2, called the "Benedictus" after the Latin of the first word of his praise. He blesses God for fulfilling His promise of the Messiah, the son of David, who was soon to be born. His rightful joy at the birth of his own son is overshadowed by the Son that his son would serve, the Messiah - just as John the Baptizer's own words and life would later be overshadowed by the One he came to serve. Zechariah remembers the words of the angel to him (Luke 1:13-17), and echoes God's promise, *"to turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God."* Just as God spoke through the prophets of old, now He was speaking through Zechariah as he prophesied God's words, announcing the fulfillment of His promises in Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. May your words likewise be full of God's Words, as Colossians 3:16 exhorts *"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly"* which can only happen as you spend much time reading and meditating on all that God wrote for you.

12-12 - PROMISED - Luke 1:70-75 - Zechariah's words were appropriate for the occasion of circumcising a male Israelite, but even more so as this child was to be the messenger of Messiah. Hear Zechariah's prophesying by God's Spirit: *"as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath that He swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of*

our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days." These words capture so much of the mystery and majesty of God's longsuffering lovingkindness to His people, in keeping the promise of His covenant. The Messiah who was to come would deliver them in every sense, from all those that bound them and persecuted them. Setting them free in new spiritual life, so they could live in obedience to God's Word, in holiness and righteousness, the gifts of grace in Christ to all who put their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is the power of salvation, as Christ's death sets you free from the penalty of sin, His resurrection sets you free from the power of sin. And His ascension sets you free from the presence of sin when you will join Him in heaven. Rejoice, like Zechariah, as you consider God's great salvation in Christ. Trust and obey Him in all things, even today.

12-13 - GIVE LIGHT - Luke 1:76-79 - then Zechariah's prophesying turns from God's Son Messiah to his own son John, before closing with praise for Messiah. Listen to Luke's narrative: *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, 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, to guide our feet into the way of peace."* These burst with Old Testament allusions and echoes! God is truly doing remarkable things, right before the eyes and ears of these humble people, as His promises come true. In Luke 1:13-17 the angel had said John would go before Messiah *"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"* (an echo of Malachi 3:1). And as the gospel narrative unfolds, we will see how the rest of Zechariah's words come true, as John ministers a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, pointing people to the Lamb of God (John 1:29, Matthew 11). For He, Messiah Jesus, is the One of whom the prophets spoke, the sun of righteousness (Malachi 4), the light of the nations (Isaiah 9:2, Isaiah 42), the light of the world (John 8:12), the prince who brings peace (Isaiah 9:6). Ah, the wonder of Christ, come at Christmas, to fulfill God's covenant promises! Amen & Amen!

12-14 - STRONG IN SPIRIT - Luke 1:80 - Luke closes his narrative about John's birth and Zechariah's prophecy with one robust statement: 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."* Of course in due time, this carries on in Luke's narrative, in chapter 3:1-22, which summarizes John's ministry in preparing the way of the Lord, to make ready for Him a people prepared (see also Luke 1:15-17, 7:18-35, . John's ministry is also recorded in Matthew 3:1-12, 11:1-19, 14:1-12, Mark 1:1-11, 6:14-29, John 1:19-37, 3:22-36). Recall that the angel said John would not drink wine or strong drink, and would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." This is related to the Nazirite

vow (Numbers 6:1-3), except there is no record that John did not cut his hair, nor is there any affirmation that he was a Nazirite. But many theologians point to him as the last and greatest prophet of the Old Covenant. John certainly did live in the wilderness, eating locusts and honey, being clothed in a garment of camel's hair. But the emphasis seems to be that he would not be controlled by addictive substances, neither wine nor strong drink, such that he would be self-controlled as the servant of the Lord (Eph 5:18). But moreover, he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, from the womb. A remarkable person marked out by God before he was born for a special assignment, to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, filled with the Holy Spirit, to prepare the way for Messiah. Jesus said of him, *"truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist."* But his message and mission was to glorify Christ, and point people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. So Jesus says, *"yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."* So the message we take away from John, is Jesus, just as God planned. Only Jesus saves. Put all your trust in Him, as you live for Him today, by His power within you.

12-15 - PREPARE - Isaiah 40:1-5 - Advent is a time of anticipation of the arrival of Messiah, the promised Deliverer. God is gracious and announces the good news, and gives you time to repent and put or renew your faith in the Lord Jesus. Such was the ministry of John the Baptist, which was foretold also in Isaiah 40: *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."* The first hearers of these words were the exiles in Babylon, as God was encouraging their faith in His promises, to bring them back to the Promised Land, which He did in due time. Their sins had led to their sufferings, but God is gracious and His covenant love is everlasting. God makes the rough places smooth as He brings His people to redemption, and redemption to His people - the knowledge of salvation! John the Baptist was the final messenger of these promises, as he pointed the people to Jesus even as he pointed out Jesus to the people. And it was God at work through John, as he was filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking God's words and doing God's deeds to point us to Jesus. Do you hear his voice today, whether you are near, or far in the wilderness, seemingly away from God and His grace? Hear the words of grace, and come in repentance and faith to receive God's forgiveness in Jesus. Then live for Him, His new life through you, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen!