

LESSON 3
December 15, 2024

Unit I: Jesus, the Heir of David

Get Ready!

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 1:5-17
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:5-23, 57-80
PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 1:67-80

KEY VERSES

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)

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“You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.” (Luke 1:76-77, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Understand Luke’s intent to ground the Gospel in the covenant with David and in the Jerusalem Temple.
- Desire to do for others like John the Baptist did—prepare the way for Christ.
- Celebrate fearlessly the joy expressed in Zechariah’s song poetically or musically.

***Key Terms**

Blessed (verse 68)—Greek: *eulogétos* (yoo-log-ay-tos’): well spoken of; fortunate; worthy of “praise” (NIV).

Grant (verse 74, KJV)—Greek: *didómi* (did’-o-mee): to give, offer, allow, bestow.

Holy (verse 70)—Greek: *hagios* (hag’-ee-os): sacred; set apart by (or for) God.

Mercy (verse 72)—Greek: *eleos* (el’-eh-os): pity; compassion. It is the outward manifestation of pity or compassion; it assumes a need on the part of the person who receives it and provides resources adequate to meet the demand on the part of the person who shows it.

Prophesied (verse 67)—Greek: *prophéteuó* (prof-ate-yoo’-o): foretold; told forth; set forth matter of divine teaching by special faculty.



The Biblical Context

The gospel of Luke does not identify its author, but internal references from Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-3 verify that the same author composed Luke and Acts. The church's earliest traditions identify Luke as this author, a Gentile physician, friend, and frequent traveling companion of Paul's. Luke wrote his gospel account to reveal Christ and all He came to do and teach until His ascension (see Acts 1:1-2). The uniqueness of Luke's gospel is its scholarly and meticulous writing style, often detailing events in Jesus' life omitted by the other three gospels. Thematically, Luke presents Jesus Christ as the Son of Man—a man of great compassion and empathy for those marginalized by society at that time: women, sinners, the poor, the sick, and the dying. Thus, Luke's Gentile perspective presents the Son of Man as the Savior offering forgiveness, salvation, and direction to this group, who were the focus of His ministry in Israel's class-conscious society. Luke begins his account by telling about Jesus' parents, the birth and predicted ministry of His cousin John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, and Christ's genealogy through Mary. Chapter 1 begins with the announcement of John the Baptist's miraculous conception (see Luke 1:5-25) and the prophetic revelation of his future ministry as the bold, uncompromising forerunner of the promised Messiah. He concludes the chapter with this lesson's focal passage, Luke 1:67-80, by announcing John's birth and Zechariah's hymn of praise and prophecy concerning John's role in paving the way for Christ's ministry.

Serve (verse 74)—Greek: *latreuó* (*lat-ryoo'-o*): to provide service to or worship (especially pertaining to God); offer.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

“We paved the way!” Dorothy Norwood repeated this phrase in the introductory narration for the beloved gospel group that recorded from the 1950s through the 1970s. In the Caravans' reunion album *Paved the Way*, Ms. Norwood spoke of how the group traveled through the South and paved the way for other gospel artists, persevering through the segregation era that denied African Americans access to overnight lodging accommodations, restaurants, and other public venues. Group member and featured singer Albertina Walker concluded in one of the final interviews before her death that no matter how great people think they are, they didn't make it on their own. Someone paved the way by laying the foundation. Each of us owes someone a measure of appreciation for whatever we have accomplished, whoever we have become, and whatever we have acquired in life. Ms. Walker's insight has tremendous practical and spiritual application. When the time arrived for God to fulfill His promise to restore fallen humanity to a right relationship with Him through His Son, He prepared a prophet, John the

Baptist—forerunner of Jesus Christ—to “pave the way” for His coming into the world.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

An Inspired Benediction (Luke 1:67-75)

KJV

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,
68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

**69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;
70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:
71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;
72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;
73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,
74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies
might serve him without fear,
75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.**

NIV

**67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:
68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and re-
deemed them.
69 “He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David
70 “(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
71 “salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—
72 “to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant,
73 “the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
74 “to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear
75 “in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”**

When Zechariah received the angelic word that he and Elizabeth would have a son in their old age, the angel who brought the announcement rendered Zechariah temporarily unable to speak because he had initially doubted the word from the Lord. When the baby was born, just as the angel foretold, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and worshipped God with a hymn of praise (**verse 67**). This hymn is known as “the Benedictus” and is filled with Old Testament quotes and references. Zechariah began with an exhortation to praise God: “He has come to redeem His people” (see **verse 68**). Next, through divine revelation, Zechariah described this redemptive deliverance through the promised Messiah. Israel’s Messiah would be the horn (strength) of her salvation and a descendant from David’s lineage, as foretold by earlier prophets (**verses 69-70**). In Jewish thought, animals’ horns symbolized their strength. Consequently, the coming Messiah would be strong and deliver the nation from her enemies to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant (**verses 71-73**).

As a result, Israel’s redemption would allow the nation to serve God without fear and live righteously before Him perpetually (**verses 74-75**). Zechariah began his hymn with a call to worship God for raising a deliverer to redeem the nation from its enemies, thus allowing God’s people freedom to serve God in holiness without fear. Likewise, we who have experienced deliverance from the bondage and condemnation of sin through Jesus Christ should praise God for our salvation without fear and praise Him with holy living that produces the fruit of righteousness for His glory and honor.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can we visibly demonstrate Zechariah's kind of joy for salvation in his "Benedictus"—his hymn of praise?

An Inspired Destiny (*Luke 1:76-80*)

KJV

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;

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

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

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.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

NIV

76 "And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

77 "to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

78 "because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

79 "to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Like any proud dad, Zechariah turned his attention to his newborn son during his inspired prophecy. Zechariah prophesied about his son's future in this part of his praise song. First, he proclaimed that John would be called the prophet of the Most High (**verse 76**), a unique role since there had been no prophet among the Jews for centuries. Further, Zechariah foretold that John would be the one to go before the Lord to prepare the way for Him by turning people's hearts to repentance (**verse 77**). Previous kings would often send servants ahead to ensure that the roads they were to travel were passable and command them to smooth out rough places. Spiritually, this was John the Baptist's commission—to prepare people's hearts for the Messiah by proclaiming the path to salvation through forgiving sins. John's preparatory ministry had been prophesied centuries before (see Malachi 3:1); thus, God had fulfilled that promise with John's birth and identified the crucial role that he would play in the deliverance of salvation that God promised. The closing verses of Zechariah's song emphasize the nature of the

promised salvation. Zechariah said that salvation would come because of God's compassion, "His tender mercies," revealed through Jesus Christ, here depicted as the "Sunrise from on high."

Additionally, He will bring light (knowledge, truth) and salvation into the world (**verse 78**). The light He brings will shine on those living in spiritual ignorance (darkness) and separation from God (death's shadow). The ultimate purpose is to guide those receiving the Light into the path that brings inner peace (**verse 79**). John the Baptist was not the Light, but the one chosen to draw people's attention to Jesus Christ, who is the Light. In **verse 80**, Luke briefly describes John's physical and spiritual maturation. Some speculate that his aged parents may have given him over to some ascetic group inhabiting the wilderness regions east of Jerusalem. However, no concrete evidence supports this and other views regarding John's upbringing. Luke tells us that John grew and became strong in Spirit in preparation for his prophetic ministry.

As we anticipate celebrating Christ's first Advent as the ultimate Redeemer, this lesson challenges us who have received the Light to emulate John's ministry of pointing others to Him for salvation. However, like John, we must ensure that we are spiritually equipped by (1) submitting to the Holy Spirit's leadership, and (2) practicing spiritual disciplines that enable us to grow strong in the Spirit as he did.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What spiritual challenges and fears must you overcome to be a twenty-first-century John the Baptist?

A Closing Thought

God is always an "on-time God." When the time arrived for Him to fulfill His covenant promise to redeem Israel and fallen humanity spiritually, He prepared a forerunner to pave the way for His Son's advent into the world. This forerunner, John the Baptist—the miracle baby of an aged devout priest and his wife—was ordained a prophet and commissioned to prepare people's hearts for repentance so that they would be ready to experience the salvation that Christ would offer through forgiving sins. There are those now who need rescuing from the darkness of spiritual blindness and the threat of eternal separation from God. Regrettably, some will not find the path to salvation unless those in Christ "pave the way." Therefore, it is vital that the faith community intentionally activates John the Baptist's ministry of pointing others to Christ collectively and individually so that all who accept Him can be restored to a right relationship with God.

Your Life

God has given every believer one or more spiritual gifts to build up the church, the body of Christ. There is, however, one "calling" that every believer shares and should fulfill: pointing others to Christ so that they can be rescued from spiritual ignorance and restored from separation from God. Therefore, how spiritually prepared are you to accomplish this task? What

spiritual disciplines will you practice to become Christ's redemptive "forerunner," paving the path to salvation through Him?

Your World!

God used John the Baptist to prepare the way for His "rescue and restoration" plan for humanity's salvation. Now, we—the saved and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit—have John's task of "paving the way" for lost sinners to experience this available salvation through forgiveness of sin. During this Advent season, what better gift could you share than the message that salvation is still open and accessible through the One who came to dwell among humanity to seek and save the lost? Will you be the "John the Baptist" that someone needs this season?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, give us a heart like Yours, one full of compassion for the lost and the desire to "pave the way" to Christ for the salvation that He offers freely. In His precious name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson ("Breaking News!") challenges us to intentionally proclaim the good news of our Savior's birth.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, December 16	"The Coming King of Peace"	(Isaiah 11:1-9)
TUESDAY, December 17	"God Is Doing a New Thing"	(Isaiah 43:14-21)
WEDNESDAY, December 18	"O God, Come Down and Save Us!"	(Isaiah 64)
THURSDAY, December 19	"A Great and Peaceful King"	(Micah 5:1-6)
FRIDAY, December 20	"The Word Became Flesh"	(John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18)
SATURDAY, December 21	"Christ Is King! Worship Him!"	(Hebrews 1)
SUNDAY, December 22	"Christ Is Born! Glorify Him!"	(Luke 2:1-16)

NOTES
