

Luke 1:67-79 (ESV): Zechariah's Blessing

Main point: God's tender mercies are with you.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: This is the second ancient "advent hymn" from Luke's gospel story of Jesus' birth, according to Christian tradition:

1. Mary's Magnificat
2. Zechariah's blessing after the birth of his son, John the Baptist
3. the Angels' "Gloria in excelsis"
4. Song of Simeon

Zechariah was a temple priest and a righteous man, married to Elizabeth, a righteous woman. "But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were old." (1:7)

While doing his priestly duties in the temple one day, Zechariah gets a visit from Gabriel, who tells him that his wife Elizabeth will bear a son, the baby that will eventually become John the Baptist, whose role will be "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (1:17)

How do you think Zechariah reacted to this startling news??

- Didn't believe it: "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." (1:18).
- Result: the angel says Zechariah will not be able to speak until the baby is born.
- And sure enough, Elizabeth gets pregnant!

Focus of study:

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹ And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ...

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has visited and redeemed his people

⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us

in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies

and from the hand of all who hate us;

⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
 and to remember his holy covenant,
⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand 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
 in the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
 whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
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.”

Questions:

1. *What happened?* The angel’s news came true: Elizabeth had a baby, and they named him John.
2. *What are the first words out of Zechariah’s mouth once he can speak again?*
 - a. *Blessed be the Lord God*
 - b. *Why? “He has visited and redeemed his people” (v. 68)*
3. *Why do people come visit? What is it like when someone visits you?*
 - a. *They know you; they enjoy you; they love you and want to be with you; they stay with you. You enjoy their company and get to know one another better. You’re not lonely or alone.*
 - b. *How does it feel when God visits you?*
4. In vs. 69-75, Zechariah then recounts a lot of God’s promises to the Jewish people [simply refer to these verses and points rather than delving into them too deeply]:
 - a. *raised up a horn of salvation*
 - b. *to save us from our enemies*
 - c. *to show mercy and remember his covenant, starting with Abraham*
 - d. *to set his people apart in holiness and righteousness*
5. *Then he turns to his own baby boy, John, in verse 76. What does he say that John will be called? And what will be John’s purpose?*
 - a. *Called the prophet of the Most High*
 - b. *Go before the Lord and prepare the way*
 - c. *Tell people about forgiveness and God’s tender mercy*
6. *Let’s focus on that beautiful phrase, “tender mercy” – how does Zechariah continue to describe it?*
 - a. *v. 78-79: like sunrise, giving light – to whom? To those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*
 - b. *What else does light do? “guide our feet” – going where? “the way of peace.”*
7. *So what is God’s tender mercy like for us?*
 - a. *Like a sunrise; like a lighted path; like life*

- b. Beautiful, gentle, sure, like the best company you ever had in your home
 - c. He is with you in this way, every day.
8. Ask for any prayer requests for today.
 9. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
 10. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace