

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 angel says “you shall call the baby’s name John,” and that John’s role will be “to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” (1:17)

How do you think Zechariah reacted to this startling news of his wife having a baby??

- 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!

When the baby boy is born, the relatives think he should be named after his father; but both Elizabeth and Zechariah insist that the baby’s name must be John, according to what the angel said. And as soon as Zechariah tells the people the name John, here is what happens:

Focus of study:

⁶⁷ And [John’s] 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 God 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 God 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. *To review: What happened?* The angel’s news came true: Zechariah’s wife, 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 anymore.
 - 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 [*if you like, simply refer to these verses and points rather than delving into them too deeply*]:
 - a. raised up a horn of salvation: *What do animals use their horns for?*
 - i. Strength, power, victory. “Horns are the chief means of [an animal’s] attack and defense; they are emblems of power, dominion, glory, and fierceness. ‘Horn of salvation,’ applied to Christ, means a salvation of strength, or a strong Savior.”¹
 - ii. This horn is a symbol of God’s power “to save us from our enemies” (v. 71).
 - b. to show mercy and remember his covenant, starting with Abraham. *What’s a covenant? What was God’s promise to his people?*
 - i. To be their God! To set his people apart in “holiness and righteousness” (v. 75).
5. *In v. 76, Zechariah turns his prayer to his own baby boy, John. What does Zechariah say that John will be called? And what will be John’s purpose?*
 - a. Zechariah says John shall be called “the prophet of the Most High.” This very baby, John, will become John the Baptist, the one who told people about Jesus even before Jesus appeared on the scene.
 - b. Go before the Lord and prepare the way. *How will John prepare people for God’s visit? If you have someone visiting your house, what do you tell your family about them ahead of time?*
 - i. What the person is like, how to respect and treat the person.
 - ii. John told people about:
 1. God’s salvation
 2. God’s forgiveness of their sins
 3. God’s tender mercy
6. *Let’s focus on that beautiful phrase, “tender mercy” – how does Zechariah continue to describe God’s tender mercy?*

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/horn/>

- a. v. 78-79: like sunrise, giving light – *to whom?*
 - i. To those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death
 - b. *What else does light do? Where?*
 - i. “guide our feet”
 - ii. “in 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. God is with you in this way, every day.

Zechariah’s prayer song blesses and glorifies God for coming to visit people on Earth, for fulfilling the promises made from long ago to send salvation, forgiveness, and mercy through Jesus, God’s son. This is a glorious reminder of what we celebrate at Christmas!

- Ask for any prayer requests for today.
- Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

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