

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for December 20: Go, tell it on the mountain

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The stories of Christmas should ever have a missionary emphasis. These accounts not only tell of the coming of the Savior. They also include ideas that we should share this “Good News” with all people. The birth of Jesus teaches us both about salvation or deliverance from sin and death and also underlines our responsibility to share this message. The Christmas story contains the strongest and purest missionary motif. This message is to be sounded everywhere.

John, the baptizer, came to be the one to go before the Messiah to declare the Messiah’s coming and prepare the way. The angel, Gabriel, appeared to Zechariah, a priest, and informed him he and his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son (Luke 1:5-25).

The nature and meaning of John’s ministry are beautifully expressed in Zechariah’s song (Luke 1:57-66). Zechariah doubted due to his and his wife’s ages. Because of this doubt, Zechariah was unable to speak when he finally came out of the temple.

Elizabeth became pregnant; the son was born. The family and community friends thought the parents should follow the custom and name the son after the father. Elizabeth insisted the name be John. Finally, the visitors at the birth asked Zechariah to write his choice for the name. Zechariah wrote, “His name is John.” At that moment, Zechariah was freed to speak, and he communicated God’s message through this song. This song, Benedictus, means blessed. It is the first word of the song in the Vulgate.

The primary emphasis in the song is God's saving action for humankind.

God saves us from sin (Luke 1:67-71)

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, that is, given the gift of prophecy or the ability to speak God's message under inspiration. The prophet began with praise to God. He expressed the basis for this praise pointing to God redeeming (buying back, paying the price of forgiveness) his people.

God "raised up the horn of salvation." Among God's people, the horn was a symbol of power. Zechariah's song indicates God has exercised his unlimited power to liberate all humans from their sins through the loving Messiah, Jesus. The "song" moves forward to stress that in this remarkable salvation provision, God was acting in line with his promises to the line of David. God's promises to the people are but the outworking of God's promises to the people of David's line.

God saves us to serve (Luke 1:72-77)

God's gracious salvation that comes by God's mercy streams directly from the promises in the covenant God made with his people and oath God gave to Abraham. The first link in this promise was salvation and deliverance to the people of Luke's day and to believers today. The people of God would be rescued from the hands of their enemies.

The second link in this pronouncement relates to service. God redeems his people to enable them to serve him without fear. The word "fearlessly" comes at the beginning of the sentence and could be interpreted with either "to rescue" or with "to enable them to serve him." Most interpreters place the word fearlessly with the second infinitive, to serve him. God's redeemed people experience deliverance from the dominion of Satan and evil and also God's enabling power to serve him without fear. God's people will live in his salvation and will serve him in "holiness and righteousness"

in that they belong to God and that they live as children of God should live.

Zechariah's song then turned to expressing the special nature of the miraculous son, John. John would be called a prophet of the Most High. For more than four centuries, no true prophet had served in Israel. The service of John would be, according to Zechariah that he would be the forerunner of Messiah, and the one who would prepare the way. John would provide knowledge of God's salvation that the people would experience through the forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness could come only through Messiah.

God saves us for peace (Luke 1:78-79)

In the final words of his song, Zechariah, still under God's inspiration, speaks of another great end of the Messiah's coming, peace among those who follow Messiah. The idea of "the tender mercies of God" rests on the Jewish belief that the center of emotions and feelings rested in the body's inner parts. The words actually are "bowels and mercies." God's great desire for all persons rests at the base of the momentous gift of Messiah. God's salvation would come upon humans with the grace seen in the rising of the sun and its life-giving powers to humans. Even those in darkness could comprehend this light.

The coming Messiah to whom John was to bear witness and for whom John was to prepare the people, would guide the feet of believers into the ways of peace. Peace in this verse relates to living in this dark world without fear or anxiety. The term "peace" also indicates the necessity that God's people live together in harmony. The cross breaks down the hostility between people, making peace (Ephesians 2:14-18).

The beautiful message of Zechariah's song indicates that the message of Messiah is for all humankind. We are to share this good news with all. This message of God's gracious gift of the savior, the Messiah, must be told to all. Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and everywhere—that Jesus

Christ is born!