

Series: Birth of the King

December 15, 2019

Title: Path of Peace

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Text: Luke 1:67-79

A Savior

The Big Question:

Did you ever hold a newborn in your arms and find yourself asking yourself, "I wonder what this little girl or little boy will grow up to be?" You look into those little eyes and see such a marvelous potential! Will those tiny hands dribble a basketball some day? Will those tiny feet one day wear ballet slippers? Will those loud little lungs someday sing a beautiful melody?

This was the very question that the friends and family of Elizabeth and Zechariah found themselves asking when they witnessed the naming of their newborn son, John.

He was, after all, a miracle baby. To their shock and amazement, Elizabeth – even though "well advanced in years" – had given birth to a little boy. And when both she and her deaf and dumb husband had insisted on the name "John," Zechariah had instantly been healed, just as the angel Gabriel had predicted!

So they asked the question:

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Luke 1:66 NIV

"What then is this child going to be?"

A visit from God:

John's father, Zechariah answered their question. After 9 months of silence, everything he had come to understand and wished to say came gushing out all at once! And what he had to say was that God had at last come to rescue His people and restore His relationship with them.

He begins by describing just what it is that God is doing:

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Luke 1:68 NIV

*"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them."*

Luke uses a very special word to describe God coming to His people. He uses the Greek word for *to visit*. God has *visited His people*.

But this is a very special kind of visit. Think, for example, of what happens when someone falls down and gets hurt and you call 911. In a few minutes you get a *visit* from the emergency squad. They don't just stop by for a cup of coffee and some chitchat! They are there to do a mission of helping an injured person.

And that is the sense of what Luke meant by using the word *visit*. Zechariah is saying that God Himself is answering the 911 call for rescue! Things will never be the same. God is already present to make things right.

A Savior:

Zechariah uses Exodus language to describe the rescue mission. When God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, He told Moses that He had heard their crying out for rescue. Then He said:

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Exodus 3:8 NIV

"So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...."

The original language of the passage says that God *visited* His people. He came to redeem them out of slavery. But now someone greater than Moses is coming, someone of the kingly line of King David. He will save His people from all their enemies.

In some mysterious way, the little baby in Zechariah's arms will play a key part in this story.

But first, Zechariah needs to connect the rescue mission to God's greater purpose for His people and his world.

Covenant

A promised remembered:

In the middle of a long, hot day long ago, God had paid a visit to the father of the Jewish people, Abraham. The LORD and two others appeared to Abraham as visiting strangers. Abraham asked them to stay for dinner. While dinner was being prepared, he learned that this was much more to this visit than a chance meeting of strangers.

The LORD had come to inform Abraham that he and his wife would soon have a baby boy. Abraham and Sarah were both in their old age; having a child was physically impossible. But not when God *pays you a visit!*

God had come to visit Abraham in order to fulfill a long-standing promise, or covenant, between them. The LORD had sworn to Abraham that he would have an heir.

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Genesis 15:5 NIV

He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Mercy:

The Bible has a special word for God showing His love and faithfulness to the covenant He has made with His people. The word is "mercy." Mercy here doesn't mean taking pity on someone who is going through a hard time. It refers specifically to God honoring His commitment to His covenant partner and showering them with His care and love.

This is what God did for Abraham and Sarah when He blessed them with baby Isaac. He showed them mercy. And Zechariah says that God was doing the very same thing through the birth of the coming birth of the Messiah:

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Luke 1:72-73 NIV

*"to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant*

"the oath he swore to our father Abraham:"

The birth of the Messiah was the crowning act of covenant love, of covenant mercy. It was the fulfillment of the ancient promise that God made to Abraham.

Covenant partners!

The burning question for God's people focused on how they could at last demonstrate to God that *they* were faithful covenant partners. It was one thing for God to hold up His end of the bargain. He was faithful at all times. But the same could not be said for human beings! And until they could be faithful and obedient to their end of the bargain, the covenant blessings and promises were on hold.

But now through Jesus, the Messiah, God's people would finally be able to function as true covenant partners with their God. The Messiah would set them free and give them the power to do what they had never been able to do on their own:

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Luke 1:74-75 NIV

*"to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear*

"in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."

Think of it: to finally be holy and faithful enough to be God's partner forever! That is what Zechariah said was happening through the birth of John and the Messiah. The age-old dilemma of trying to figure out how to be God's faithful partner was solved. The covenant blessings could now be poured out on God's people.

Path of Peace

John:

Remember the question that family and friends asked when John the Baptist was named? "What then is this child going to be?" Now Zechariah can answer their question:

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Luke 1:76-77 NIV

*"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,*

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

This miracle baby would grow up to be the one who made God's people ready for the Messiah. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he would lead a great national revival in which people turned from their sins and seek forgiveness from God. That is how John would prepare a highway for the great King.

Notice how important it is in God's Story that you and I are fully engaged! When God *visits* us and shows us His love and covenant mercy, we are called to respond with repentance. It is up to us to embrace the salvation that He offers. We are His covenant *partners*.

"The Rising Sun"

And when we do, the same thing happens for us that happened for those who welcomed and accepted Jesus as Lord. He comes and shines into the darkened places of our lives. He leads us like a Good Shepherd on our own Exodus out of the slavery of sin into His Promised Land.

Zechariah says it this way:

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Luke 1:78-79 NIV

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

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

The Rising Sun is none other than Jesus Himself. He comes because of God's covenant love, God's tender mercy. He comes to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Path of Peace:

If you've ever waited for sunrise, you know that there isn't anything you can do to make it happen. Sometimes it feels like the long, cold night will never end. But then, at last, you see the faintest glow of pink in the eastern sky. Dawn has begun. Moment by moment the sky brightens. The sun's rays touch the high clouds while the earth lies in the dark below. And then, all of a sudden, the sun appears from behind a distant mountain. There is no turning back to the darkness. The day has come.

That is what happened for this poor old world when Jesus was born. God had promised Abraham that the Day would come. The night would not last forever. John the Baptist got people out of bed to greet the Dawn. Zechariah announced the first glow of pink in the eastern sky. The shadow of death had met its match. The gates of the Promised Land swung wide to greet God's People.

Those gates are open for you today.