

**The Joy of a Name**  
**Luke 1:57-80 & Acts 10:34-43**

In Romeo and Juliet, Juliet argues that names don't matter because they don't affect who a person really is. If Romeo was not a Montague, then she, a Capulet could marry him without any difficulty. Her argument compares Romeo to a flower and says,

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
 By any other name would smell as sweet;*

But in the Bible, as we see in the naming of John and Jesus, names are very important, a reflection of personhood.

When last we saw Mary, she was leaving Elizabeth's house to return to Nazareth. V 56

**First: The Birth of John the Baptist. 57-66**

- a) V 57 - Gabriel's promise came true – v 14 - *And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,*

*"shown" in v 57 is the same verb, "magnify" in v 46.* The NT is all about God magnifying his OT work. Hidden things are now being made plain.

1 Peter 1:10-12 - *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, <sup>11</sup> inquiring what person or time<sup>[a]</sup> the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.*

- APP:** 1 - How might you apply that to things you don't understand now?  
 2- How might what you are enduring benefit someone else later? (2 Cor 1:4).

- b) V 58 - And Elizabeth's hope came true – 25 - *The Lord has.... Take[en] away my reproach among people.*

Everywhere we look, the sound of "good news of great joy" (2:10) is breaking out all over the land.

**APP:** Don't miss that personal application. Salvation is all about removing reproach. How can you hold something against yourself God himself has removed?

- c) V 59a – According to the law, John needed to be circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day and Z and E complied (Gen 17:12-13; 24:4; Phil 3:5).
- d) V 59b – Traditionally, a firstborn son was normally named after his father but...
- e) V 60 - Elizabeth surprised everyone by naming him, 'John.'
- f) V 61 – And when everyone protested –

E is now under pressure.

V 59 – *"they would have called him Zechariah..."*

V 61 – *"they said to her..."*

v 62 – *"they made signs to his father..."*

In a reversal of the Garden experience where Adam, like Z was mute, E does not bow to community pressure but names him John.

The **Daily Devotion** has a word about God's grace to you when you are tempted to disobey God.

- g) V 63 – Z asked for a writing tablet and wrote, *"His name is John,"* just as Gabriel said – v 12
- Zechariah means *'God remembers.'*
- Elizabeth means *'God is faithful.'*
- John means *'God is merciful.'*

It's the Gospel in three names: God remembers his word and is faithful to show mercy.

**APP:** 1 – What promises has God remembered to you?

2 – How has God been faithful to you?

3 – How has God been merciful to you?

It's important for Christians to have good memories.

- h) V 64 – As soon as he obeyed in faith, his voice returned.

As always, the timing was impeccable – 1:20 – *“...you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place...”*

Yet Z didn't get his voice back the day John was born but the day he named him. God waited until Z's faith came alive. His faith opened his mouth.

III – On Wednesday nights we're talking about how the disciples' faith matured slowly. Some people, like E and M, believe immediately, Others, like Z, take time. In the end, it is the Holy Spirit's application of the good news that saves us. But no matter how we are saved, there's room at the cross, and in Heaven, for all of us.

**Note:** And this only adds to Luke's credibility with Theophilus. If he was writing an account intent on persuading T regardless of the circumstances, everyone would have believed immediately and joyfully. Instead, Luke records resistance to faith, in effect, taking into consideration, any reservations T might have, or that his friends and family might also need time to believe what Luke has written. But in the end....

i) 65-66 – Fear and expectation filled the hill country of Judea

V 66 – “laid them up in their hearts...” =

Luke 2:19 - *But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*

If he wants to go and interview Z and E, Theophilus will probably run into a lot of people in the hillside around Jerusalem who can confirm Luke's history before he ever gets to Z and E.

**APP:** We all have a part in sharing the good news.

### **Second: Zechariah's Song. 67-79**

Zechariah's song can be divided into two parts, first a word about God' salvation and then a word about his son, John.

Z has been silent for 9 months. But God has given him something to sing about.

1 - V 64 – *“And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.”*

There are four songs in these two birth narratives of John and Jesus.

- Mary in 1:46-56
- Zechariah in 1:67-79
- The angels in 2:13-14
- Simeon's in 2:29-32

Mary's song is called the *Magnificat*. Zechariah's song is called the *Benedictus*, after the Latin translation of its first word, 'blessed' (v 68).

- Several times in Paul's writings, he breaks out into song in the middle of a passage: Ro 1:25; 9:25; 11:36; 16:25-27; Gal 1:4-5; Eph 3:20-21; Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:14-16; 18.
- When God created the worlds, the angels broke out in song –

Job 38:4-7 - *Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. <sup>5</sup> Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? <sup>6</sup> On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, <sup>7</sup> when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

There is something unique about experiencing God and singing.

- 2 - v 67 – And Z too, is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophecies.

It is important to note that both Mary and Zechariah's songs are spoken in the past tense, celebrating what God has done as the assurance (Hb 11:1) of what God will do.

**A good memory is necessary for active faith.**

- 3 – v 68. This song is all about salvation. Salvation is a divine visitation, not a human invention.

"*he has visited...*" The OT is filled with God's visitations, Jesus appearing to various people. But in the NT, he is plainly seen as the face of God.

The invisible voice that walked with A&E in the Garden and the angel who wrestled with Jacob at Peniel, just to name a few, has now taken on human flesh, not human form, but actually become human to " *dwell*" (John 1:14) among us. (He has come to dwell with us and we are going to live with him).

Z lists 12 benefits of God's salvation

- Deliverance from enemies. 71
- Mercy from God. 72a
- Remembrance by God. 72b
- Justification by faith. 72-73
- Service without fear. 74
- Holiness. 75
- Righteousness. 75
- The knowledge of salvation. 77a
- Forgiveness of sins. 77b
- Mercy from God. 78
- Light in darkness. 79a
- Peace 79b

4 – v 69a – A horn is the 'business end' of an animal's strength.

They imply power (1 Kings 22:11; Dan 8:3) and kingship (Dan 7:23-24; Rev 17:12).

*Psalm 22:2-3 - The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, <sup>3</sup> my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge,*

5 – vs 69b-70 – Salvation is the fulfilment of God's promise (Enough cannot be said about this)

One of the saddest verses in the Bible is – "*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved*" (Jeremiah 8:20),

- If the summer, grain harvest passed without a crop, there was still hope for the grape harvest in early autumn. If one failed, the other would sustain Judah. But if both failed, only death waited for them in the winter.

But that's not true of you. God has forever saved you.

6 – v 71 – Israel had a long list of enemies: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Canaanites

Israel was looking for a new exodus but never imagined it would imply a spiritual and eternal dimension.

7 – vs 72-73 – It's important to know God's motive. It's never us and that takes the pressure off us. It places it on the only shoulders capable of saving us.

8 – vs 74-75 – Israel thought primarily of political/military salvation.

- It's the reason for Peter's rebuke of Jesus in Mark 8.
- Even after the resurrection, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were "*looking sad*" because "*we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*" (Luke 24:17).

But God's plan is to offer complete freedom from the bonds of sin, guilt, punishment, curse, Satan, and everlasting destruction.

In other words, everything God has promised is fulfilled in Jesus. Without Christ, we would suffer in this life and then forever. He is the salvation that God provides.

9 - v 76 - In spite of his fatherly pride, Zechariah recognized that John was a supporting actor in God's plan. John was born before Jesus but subordinate to Jesus. He was not great in and of himself but in God's purposes for him. (That's an incredible application for us all)

Now that John is circumcised and named, his father pronounces a blessing -

10 - v 77 – This is what God means by salvation.

Like Israel, we are usually wrong about our truest needs. We tend to look at the physical, material and temporal. We want God to save us from things that will only haunt us again. Nothing will really change until our sin is addressed.

Apart from Jesus, the world does not fix any of its problems. It finds temporary solutions until larger problems exit. We have cut our toe on the proverbial can we have kicked down the road and the infection is going to kill us.

There is no such thing as social transformation without spiritual regeneration. Only the fear of God teaches us how to approach life's problems (Prov 1:7). What we need more than anything else is a right relationship to God, out of which we fund the rest of life. That right relationship to God can only come through the cross on which Jesus died.

As Luke later recorded Peter saying –

*"Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,<sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.<sup>36</sup> As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),<sup>37</sup> you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed:<sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.<sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,<sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,<sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.<sup>42</sup> And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.<sup>43</sup> To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."* (Acts 10:34b-43).

11 – v 78 – "tender mercy" = *splanchna eleos*

God shows mercy to Israel by remembering his covenant with Abraham to bless the world through him (Gen 12:1-3) and make his offspring as numerous as the stars of Heaven (Gen 26:4).

Luke took the normal word for 'mercy,' and intensified it by connecting it to a word for deep feeling.

12 – v 79a Sunrise and light

This separation of darkness and light is a recurrent Bible theme that began in Genesis 1:3-5.

This idea of light as life and darkness as death (Psalm 23:4) are images of ignorance and sin, the plight of every human being. So Isaiah explained the Gospel in those terms.

*Isaiah 9:2 - The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*

And Jesus referenced it in his call to Saul of Tarsus -

*Acts 26:18 – [Paul's recollection of Jesus' calling] - I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that*

*they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*

Luke records this instance of the battle between light and darkness as one between God and Satan –

**Acts 13: 4-12** - *So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. <sup>6</sup> When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. <sup>7</sup> He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup> But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. <sup>9</sup> But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup> and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? <sup>11</sup> And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup> Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*

The coming of Jesus promises to cast light into darkness and banish even the least shadow.

13 – v 70b - Guidance into peace. 79b

Is this peace that comes from walking in the light of Jesus as our sunrise? Think of how you walk differently in the darkness vs the light.

**Two thoughts:**

1 – Look at the reason God does everything

Mary in v 50 - *his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*

Mary in v 54 - *He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,*

Zechariah in 72 - *to show the mercy promised to our fathers*



Mercy is God's undeserved favor.

You may say, "*I don't deserve...*" You're right. No one does. But God's motive has never been 'you,' or 'us,' but himself. He does what he does because of who he is.

2 – Look how everyone ties Jesus to God's OT promises

**Gabriel** in v 16 - *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup> and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."*

**Gabriel** in v 32 - *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

**Mary** in vs 54-55 - *He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."*

**Zechariah** in 68-70 - *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

**Zechariah** in 72-73a - *to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham,*

Once again Luke is reminding Theophilus that the story he is telling had a beginning in real time and real history, but it is so wonderful that it will not have an ending.

This is how he ends his Gospel – 24:50-43 - *And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple blessing God.*

And this is how he ends Acts – 28:30 - *He [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.*

Those are not endings. Those are unendings. Because the Gospel is so incredibly fantastic, it will have no end.

*"...but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."*

– C.S. Lewis in *The Last Battle*

And this is the unending God invites you to this morning.

### **Third: Luke's Has a Final Word**

The Bible wasn't originally written in chapters and verses but, in what is now the longest chapter in the NT, Luke closes with a word about John the Baptist.

V 80 - *And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

**Conclusion:** Juliet's argument about names begins,

*O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.*

But all throughout Luke 1, it is names that point to Jesus and mean everything.

Let's sing, *God Be Praised*.

## Community Groups

- 1 – Read the text
- 2 – What do Elizabeth’s neighbors consider God’s motive for giving her a child in v 58?
- 3 – Why is mercy an important reason for God’s goodness to us?
- 4 – How have you experienced or seen God’s mercy applied to yourself or others?
- 5 – Talk about the community pressure revealed in vs 59-62 and Elizabeth’s response.
- 6 – What kind of pressures do you face to do things the world’s way and not obey the Lord?
- 7 – What happened when Zechariah confirmed the name of the child?
- 8 – How did the neighbors respond to the return of Zechariah’s voice?
- 9 – Who has been filled with the Holy Spirit thus far and what does that look like?
- 10 – What does “salvation” look like in Zechariah’s prophecy?
- 11 – According to Zechariah, John’s birth has implications beyond he and Elizabeth. What are the wider implications of your salvation?
- 12 – What words does Zechariah use in his song that could be applied to Jesus and how does this broaden our understanding of Jesus and his ministry?
- 13 – How should John the Baptist live according to vs 76-77?
- 14 – How does returning Zechariah’s voice speak to second chances and what does that say for you and those you love?

## Daily Devotion

Mon, Jan 5<sup>th</sup>. Lk 1:57-58. In fulfillment of Gabriel’s promise (from God), Elizabeth has a baby boy. This was a fulfillment of an OT promise made hundreds of years before John was born. What is your favorite Bible promise? And what promises has God kept to you? Using your favorite promises and God’s faithfulness to you, encourage someone else to have faith in God today.

Tues, Jan 6<sup>th</sup>. Lk 1:59-63. Elizabeth came under a lot of pressure to name her new son after his dad. Nevertheless, she remained steadfast calling him John. The church is under pressure to rename a lot of things; sin, gender, marriage, etc. What about you? Do you recall a time you were pressured to disobey God and you did not? What were the results? Use that moment to encourage your heart to obey God now. Then, also share it with someone whom you suspect is being pressured to conform to the world.

Wed, Jan 7<sup>th</sup>. Lk 1:64-66. The return of Zechariah’s voice made news throughout Judea and prompted questions about John. This is another indication that God’s blessings are meant to be shared to honor God and spread his fame. What would you say are God’s great blessings to you? How are you giving God glory for that? Is there any way you

could share that blessing? If so, be deliberate in your plans to share God's goodness to you.

Thur, Jan 8<sup>th</sup>. Lk 1:67-75. Zechariah sings about God's goodness to Israel. List all the things he says God has done. According to Zechariah, what is God's motivation? And why has God done these things? These are all important questions for your own life. Why does God do what he does: mercy and to keep his word to himself (72-73). And why does he do it: so that Israel might serve him (74). This takes the burden off of you and places it on the only Person who can bear it, God. This enables you to serve God with joy and not worry. That's the Gospel: Good news, great joy (2:10). And that's something to sing about.

Fri, Jan 9<sup>th</sup>. Lk. 1:76-79. What is John's job description: to talk about God, to remind people Jesus is coming, to tell people about salvation and forgiveness, to remind people that Jesus gives us light now and in death so that we can live in peace. Hmm. That sounds like something we should all be doing. Of all those things, what one could you do today? Do that.