

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

**68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come and has redeemed his people.
69 He has raised up a horn
of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
71 salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—
72 to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
76 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,
77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
79 to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”
80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived
in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Blessed be the Lord God.

1. He remembered his holy covenant.
2. He gives us the knowledge of Salvation.

Last week we looked at the Song of Mary. The Magnificat is a well-known song of praise in our circles because we sing it from time to time in our liturgies. Today we are looking at the Song of Zechariah, or the Benedictus. This song isn't as familiar to us because it's not

found in any of the liturgies in our hymnal. Yet, the words of the Benedictus are familiar to us. For most of Zechariah's words come from well-known passages in the Old Testament. Tonight we join Zechariah in saying, blessed be the Lord God. For he has remembered his holy covenant and he gives us the knowledge of salvation.

Throughout the history of the nation of Israel, there were prophets. From Moses, to Elijah, to Jeremiah—Israel had many prophets. That is until Malachi. He ended that blessing for the Israelites. Malachi wrote his book around 430 B.C. He wrote about the coming Messiah. As well as prophesied about his processor. We read this prophecy in our Old Testament lesson for today. **Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me.** And then, silence. Malachi was the last prophet God spoke through for over 400 years.

Then an old priest by the name of Zechariah was chosen by lot to enter the Holy Place of the temple to offer up incense to the Lord. This was a rare opportunity in the life of any priest. It very well could have been the only time Zechariah had the opportunity to do this. It wasn't supposed to take long, burn the incense and get out—but Zechariah was taking a long time. Then Zechariah was supposed to pronounce a blessing over all the people and fellow priests who were watching and waiting for him. When Zechariah finally came out he couldn't speak. He was silent—just like God and the prophets who were silent for over 400 years.

Nine months pass by. Zechariah's first and only son is born. Some people wanted to name the boy after his father. Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, objected and said his name was to be John. They asked Zechariah his opinion. He was given a writing tablet, for he still could not speak, and he wrote down, "His name is John." Then suddenly God opened Zechariah's mouth and he was able to speak again. And the first thing that came out of his mouth was a song of praise to God. **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,** he said. The one whose mouth had been shut for nine months was suddenly singing the praises of the one who shut his mouth. And this song wasn't something he came up with on his own. No, Zechariah was inspired by the Holy Spirit to sing this song. For the first time in over 400 years God was speaking

through a prophet. And he picked up where he left off. Zechariah's song was about the fulfillment of the promise of a Savior and of his forerunner.

But the focus of his song wasn't on his son but on one who was about to be born—the Savior, Jesus. If Zechariah was like most men, his song would have been different. He had a special son. It was a miracle that he was going to have a son in the first place. Let alone that an angel came and talked to him. He could have sung the praises of his son, or his own praises. But he didn't brag about himself or John. No, he sang the praises of God.

Often that is not what we do. We often brag about ourselves at every chance we get. We want people to know what we have done. We often want attention to be on ourselves and accomplishments. We find ourselves bragging about our children. Or sing the praises of our favorite athletes or celebrities. But we often fail to sing the praises of God. On Sundays, sure; and some Wednesday nights. But we often sing and brag about ourselves, family, or favorites, long before we sing about our Savior. We often put ourselves and our lives in front of God.

But when we consider, like Zechariah, all the great things the Lord has done for us, we can't help but sing his praises. We want to let everyone know what he has done for us. One of the reasons Zechariah sang God's praises is because he remembered his covenant that he gave to his children. He promised Abraham, Isaac, David, and so on that a Savior would come through them. He had reiterated this promise for thousands of years through numerous prophets. Each prophet's prophecy added to this covenant, or promise, that God made to his people. Zechariah quoted from the Old Testament as he sang that the Lord would bring **Salvation from our enemies, And from the hand of all who hate us.** There are many prophecies like this scattered throughout the Old Testament from many different prophets.

And now this priest and prophet is giving another prophecy. And here he is saying all the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled. And Jesus hasn't even been born yet. Zechariah knew that he was coming soon. So as far as Zechariah was concerned, all the prophecies have already come true. Zechariah says that the Lord God **has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people.** Jesus has yet to be

born and yet Zechariah says that he visited us. He proclaims that Jesus is God. And God came down to this earth and lived as a perfect human being. And through his perfect life and innocent death on the cross, the Lord paid the price for our sins. His blood was the ransom price demanded for our sin. Christ redeemed us—he bought us back.

Even though the focus of Zechariah's song is on the long awaited—but soon to come—Savior, he does mention his son. But it's not as if he is bragging about John. He doesn't go into great detail about all the great things he would accomplish. Rather, as he talks about his son, he talks about the Lord. Zechariah sang about John, **And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High.** John would grow up to be a prophet—the first great prophet since Malachi over 400 years before. John would speak from the Holy Spirit. He would speak the very words of God. Zechariah knew this because he was speaking by the Holy Spirit. Plus Gabriel told him so in the Holy Place nine months earlier.

When Zechariah talks about his son, he points out how his son was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. Zechariah also quotes from Isaiah, **you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways.** He would prepare the way for Christ's coming. John would do that through preaching the gospel and by baptizing. He would lead people to repentance. And prepare the hearts of minds of the people for Christ's coming. And when he saw Jesus, he pointed him out as **the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.**

We need Christ to take away our sins because we are nothing but sinners by nature. And as Christian, our sinful nature still pops up from time to time. Everyday we fail to show love to God. We go against his word countless times a day. We fail to show love to him. From time to time we fail to put him first in our lives. We care about our wants and desires. But these come often at the expense of exclaiming the greatness of God. Because of our sins we deserve eternal death.

But we aren't going to die eternally. Because we have the **tender mercy of God.** God has compassion on us. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. He doesn't condemn us for our sins. In his mercy he sent us his son. He came down from heaven to live on this sin-filled

world. In his mercy Christ suffered through the pain and torment of hell so we wouldn't have to.

Zechariah also points out that John would come, **To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation.** We have the knowledge of salvation. We know how we are saved. It is only through the work of Christ. Through his life and death we have been saved from death. Christ defeated death when he rose from the grave. We are saved from our enemies. Through Christ we will live in heaven forever. And how do we know that we are saved through the work of Christ? Because he has given us the forgiveness of sins. Christ has removed our sins by taking them upon himself when he died on the cross. Our sins can no longer condemn us. They will never return to count against us.

So we can stand before him without fear. As Zechariah sang, God rescued us so that we **Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.** Since we are made holy and righteous we want to serve God. And we are free to serve him in anyway we are able. And we will strive to sing his praises. For what he has done for us, only he can do.

These are the things that Zechariah sang about. He didn't sing about himself, or brag about his son's accomplishments. But he sang about the son-to-be-born Savior. He prophesied that these things were already accomplished. For God keeps his promises. So, let us, along with Zechariah, sing, **Blessed be the Lord God.** Amen.