

**Intro.** A few years ago at a conference at a Presbyterian church in Omaha, people were given helium filled balloons and told to release them at some point in the service when they felt like expressing the joy in their hearts. Since they were Presbyterians, they weren't free to say “Hallelujah, Praise the Lord.” All through the service balloons ascended, but when it was over 1/3 of the balloons were unreleased—the moral of the story is to let your balloon go (Bruce Larson, *Luke*, 43). We Baptists aren't too different from the frozen chosen, so we must learn to praise the Lord & bless Him. As we continue our series from Luke 1-2 on “A Christmas Carol,” we look at the last few verses of chapter 1 with Zechariah's song as “A Song of Blessing.”

Theme: Sending the Messiah

Background: God sent the angel Gabriel to inform Zechariah that their prayers had been answered & they were going to have a son, who would be the forerunner to the Messiah. Zechariah & his wife Elizabeth were old & beyond child-bearing years, so he doubted the angel. He was given a sign that it would happen & he became mute & couldn't speak for 9 months, until his son was named John. Then, after 9 months of silence & reflection, he broke out in praise to the Lord & blessed the Lord God of Israel.

- This hymn is Spirit-filled praise & prophecy—praise for sending the Davidic ruler & prophecy about John's relationship to Jesus
- This song teaches us to bless the Lord for a couple of reasons:
  - 1. Bless the Lord for His mercy in Messianic deliverance (1:68-75)**
- These verses are one long sentence in the Greek, with each aspect related to the verbs of vv. 68-69
  - a. For Christ's incarnation (1:68)**—He has visited His people
    - When we talk about the doctrine of the incarnation, it means God took on flesh, He became human. This happened in the Person of Jesus Christ. He has always been God, but He became the God-Man 2,000 years ago in Mary's womb, the baby born in Bethlehem.
  - b. For Christ's redemption (1:68)**—He has redeemed His people
    - Luke 21:28 & Acts 3:19-26 show Jerusalem's redemption includes the Son of Man's coming to rule & judge the earth (Bock 1:179)
    - Redemption in Luke includes both political & spiritual elements (political—saved from our enemies & from the hand of all who hate us, vv. 71, 74; spiritual—forgiveness of their sins, v. 77)
    - While 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jews were looking for political redemption in the coming of Messiah, God has delayed it until the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ—now is the time of spiritual redemption

Illus: You may have heard the story of the little boy who made a wooden boat & began floating it on the nearby lake. One day, a great wind came along & swept the boat away from the boy & he went home distraught. A few days later, while walking through downtown, he saw his boat for sale in a store window. When he went in to tell the owner it was his, the man said, “I'm sorry, son, but I paid for it & the only way you can have it is to buy it.” He went home, broke open his piggy bank & returned to the store & bought it. On his way home, he said, “You are twice mine—I made you & I bought you”—all of mankind is part of God's creation, but His children are doubly-His through creation & redemption.

**c. For Christ's salvation (1:69-75)**—He has raised up a horn of salvation

- To “raise up” someone in the OT meant God had sent a significant figure to His people: a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18), judge (Judges 3:9, 15), priest (1 Samuel 2:35) or king (2 Samuel 23:1)

Illus: Horns represent strength, much like an ox or a ram—that is why we think of Vikings helmets with horns on them—to show off their strength (much like our Student Ministry Viking night in 2013—show pics)

- Zechariah then highlights God's promise through the “mouth” of His holy prophets, stressing the unity of their message about the Messiah, starting with Moses & Samuel & the later prophets
- Like redemption, both political & spiritual salvation are meant (1:71)
- Four infinitives are key in vv. 72-74—to show mercy, to remember, to grant & to serve—they relate to God's covenant & while they point to God's sovereignty, they remind us that we are all called to serve the Lord without fear (because of a right relationship with Him) & in holiness & righteousness

**2. Bless the Lord for His mercy in fulfilling prophecy (1:76-79)**

**a. Concerning the forerunner to the Messiah (1:76-77)**

**1) As messenger, he prepares the way (1:76)**

- John the Baptist is the last prophet of the old covenant—he was more than a prophet because he came in the spirit of Elijah as the messenger of the Messiah (7:25-26; cf. Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6)

**2) In message, he proclaims salvation (1:77)**

- Salvation comes only to those whose sins have been forgiven—the precondition to peace with God is having one's sins forgiven through repentance (3:3; 4:18; 24:27; Acts 5:31; etc.) & forgiveness is directly connected to the work of Christ on behalf of the sinner

**b. Concerning the Messiah Himself (1:78-79)**

**1) In light of God's mercy (1:78-79a)**

- The “sunrise” is probably a reference to the Messiah, the One who will visit His people from on high, bringing light to a darkened world

**2) To lead in the way of peace (1:79b)**

- Not only does Christ's coming bring light to darkness, but His light brings guidance for people to walk in the way of peace—John would proclaim the message about salvation & peace with God, but only Jesus could actually save

Illus: Ancient lamps could be carried by hand & would shed light about 3 feet ahead, so the night traveler could see just enough for the next step & avoid snakes, scorpions & cliffs—Christ's coming has enlightened our world to help us avoid the pitfalls of life by walking in His Word moment-by-moment (cf. Psalm 119:105)

**Conc.** You may be familiar with the hymn which says “Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” But you probably aren't familiar with the song which says, “Count your many sins, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what you have done!” Yes, we are called to bless God, but you can't bless Him & praise Him until you have come to Him & you cannot come to Him unless you first agree with Him about your sins & what He has done to take care of your sin problem in sending Christ into the world to bring redemption. Turn from your sins & trust in Him. As you trust in Him, commit to His Word to bring you guidance in life.