

“Sing with Joy that Christ is Coming”

Luke 1:57-80

We sang Silent Night, a favourite carol probably of all of us. And I think we understand it may not have been a silent night after all! Births aren't usually silent. Especially after the baby is born. There are lots of joyful sounds of happy families, phone calls, and greetings from friends when they see you and your baby for the first time. And we see the shepherds here made lots of noise about Jesus' birth. But I want to back up the story a little bit and talk about John the Baptist's birth 6 months prior to Jesus' birth.

Before Mary received word from Gabriel that she would bear Jesus the Messiah, her uncle Zechariah had a visit from this same Gabriel. Zechariah was an old priest and while burning incense in the holy place at the temple in Jerusalem, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and told him his prayer was answered – that he would have a son and they were to name him John & John would prepare people for Jesus' coming.

Zechariah didn't believe Gabriel that he and Elizabeth would have a son so he asked for another sign [as if an angel speaking to him directly wasn't one!] So God gave him another sign – the inability to speak and hear until his son would be born

So 9 months of silent nights go by and then his son John is born. It was the custom to name the child after a family member on the day of their circumcision. The neighbours and relatives were insistent that the boy be named Zechariah but when they gestured to Zechariah (which indicated he was deaf also) he wrote on a tablet "his name is John". At once God removed the silence and Zechariah sang this song a song of praise to God.

This song is sung out of a repentant and now thankful heart. Zechariah sings this great song of hope – a hope that he had temporarily given up on even though he was a godly person. Even the strongest believers can allow life's negative circumstances to cloud God's promises. He had lot to think about and meditate on in those silent days and nights, waiting now for God's promise to him and Israel come true.

We should be encouraged by this song because we can get discouraged wondering if God is really working in our lives. But God is patient and wanting us to trust Him so we see ...

God uses a Doubting Zechariah to Help Bring the Message of Jesus to His Community and World

Jesus began His ministry where He lived with people He knew and knew Him. We know people doubted He was the Messiah for this reason. They said 'Isn't that the carpenter's son" (Matt. 13:55). Or 'We know where this man comes from, but when the Christ comes no one knows where He is from' (John 7:27). Or in Luke 4 when He quoted Is. 61 and said today this Scripture is fulfilled, they almost threw Him off a cliff.

It's easier to share Jesus with people who don't know you than to share Him right where you live. It's easier to send missionaries and money and maybe even go on short-term mission trips than it is to bring Jesus to our family, neighbours and friends. But as we learn here, we must start sharing

Jesus in our own towns so we're prepared to reach the world. Even if we doubt God can use us. If God used Zechariah and his weaknesses, fears and doubts He can use us in our weaknesses, fears and doubts too.

What else did God teach Zechariah that we also need to learn? The first words out of his mouth after 9 silent months are a blessing about what God is going to do for His people through Jesus and then the last 4 lines/verses are about the role of his son John. God's blessing and work is not just about you and me.

God's Blessing for Us is Meant to Impact Others **(vv.68-75)**

Zechariah understands God blessed him and Elizabeth with a son is to share God's plan to redeem Israel through the Messiah. His blessing wasn't for him alone but to share. God blesses you and me so we can bless others. Share your answers to prayer with others because they are reminded God is working. Which encourages them to keep praying too. Every day we need to remind ourselves 'It's not about me'.

This is what Zechariah's song tells us. Listen:

*⁶⁸"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel because he has come to his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹He 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),
⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— ⁷²to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath he swore to our father Abraham*

John's birth guarantees Jesus is coming. We have the blessing to share that Jesus already came brought salvation to us through the forgiveness of sins. But Jesus is also going to come again; and Zechariah sings about that when God will ultimately save His people from all our enemies to fulfill His promises to David, Abraham and through Jeremiah.

Zechariah basically told people, the Messiah is coming and He will change your life. The message hasn't changed. Jesus came and died for our sins. He's coming back to rule this world and we need to place our faith in Him before He returns.

John's ministry was to prepare people for Jesus because of the tender mercy of our God. God's promise about Jesus' coming was because He was merciful. He wasn't going to abandon His people. He would fulfill His Word to them. But we also are to be merciful as He is merciful and to forgive others as God has forgiven us. That's how we show God's mercy.

Zechariah sings of Jesus that the rising Sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those in darkness and guide our feet in peace. Many people don't realize they are separated from God by their sin. They don't even know they are in darkness and which is why they don't have peace in their life. They are unaware they live in the shadow of death – that death is the final separator between God and ourselves if we don't seek forgiveness of sins through Jesus and get the peace we need. Only faith in Jesus gives us forgiveness of sins.

Zechariah should have sung a song like this the day Gabriel appeared to him, but he doubted. And his doubt caused him to miss an opportunity to tell his community that Jesus was coming and was going to change their life. Our doubts and disobedience cause us to miss opportunities to tell our

communities Jesus came to offer forgiveness of sins and is coming again. We need to prepare our world for His return.

God saved us so He can use us. We are His strategy to change our community and world with the message of His mercy and forgiveness. Zechariah originally missed an opportunity to do this but God in his grace gave Him another. We've missed opportunities because of our own doubts and disobedience. But God is full of mercy and is more than willing to use us again. Are we prepared to show His message by living a distinct and right life? And are we willing to share His message of forgiveness so those in darkness receive the light of Jesus' forgiveness so they too can have lasting peace?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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