

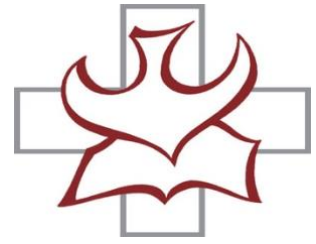
The Benedictus

Latin for “Blessed be””

Malachi 3:1-5 Luke 1:57 – 80

December 8, 2019

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The Gospel of Luke teaches us that Christmas is a big deal! The Gospel of Luke compares John the Baptist with Jesus the Savior; John was the promised forerunner who would prepare the way for the Messiah; Jesus is that long promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

The Gospel of Luke compares John the Baptist with Jesus the Savior: what happens to John happens to Jesus *but in a greater way* because He is the Son of God, the Savior of the World. The birth of Jesus is the greatest thing that’s happened in the history of the world to that point. The Gospel of Luke teaches us that Christmas is a big deal!

In the **first two chapters** of Luke, which tell of the Christmas story, there are **four songs** that celebrate the birth of Christ! **Four songs!** These songs are so important that the Holy Christian Church has turned them into **Canticles**¹; and we still sing them today! You will probably recognize the names of these **four songs** in Luke: Zechariah’s **Benedictus**, Mary’s **Magnificat**, the Angels’ **Gloria in**

THE BIRTH OF JOHN	THE BIRTH OF JESUS
Gabriel announces conception	Gabriel announces conception
In holy city of Jerusalem, in Temple	In humble village of Nazareth, in Galilee
Zechariah a Levite and priest	Mary a young virgin (repeated 2x for emphasis)
Miracle baby: Elizabeth was very old	Miracle baby: a virgin conceives by Holy Spirit
Zechariah’s question: “How shall I know?”	Mary’s question: “How shall this be?”
Name given by God: JOHN	Name given by God: JESUS
Zechariah doubts	Joseph doubts
Elizabeth believes	Mary believes
Zechariah’s muteness is sign	Elizabeth’s pregnancy is sign
Father of John sings hymn after birth	Mother of Jesus sings hymn before birth
<i>Benedictus</i>	<i>Magnificat</i>
The Birth story: natural birth	The Birth story: supernatural birth
Fulfilled OT prophecy	Fulfilled OT prophecy
The Circumcision story	The Circumcision story
The Naming story	The Naming story
“John” means “the Lord shows favor”	“Jesus” means “Yahweh saves”
He will be great in the sight of the Lord	He will be great!
Specific mission: prepare the way!	Specific mission: save the world!
Closes the Old Testament	Begins the New Testament

¹ The word “Canticle” originates from the Latin *canticulum* which means “little song”. A canticle is a “little song” from Scripture, set to music and arranged for chanting or singing, that expresses joy, thanksgiving or confidence in God and His Son who saves us from our sins. *Interesting note:* Canticles are named by the first words of their Latin text.

Excelsis Deo, and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*. Today, we want to take a look at Zechariah's *Benedictus*.

When John the Baptist's miracle birth was announced to Zechariah in the Temple, the angel made Zechariah mute until the baby was born. After Elizabeth gave birth to the baby, and at his circumcision, she named him John. That is when Zechariah was able to speak again, and he confirmed that the baby would be named **John** – which means **the Lord is gracious**. God Himself named this miracle baby; for **the Lord is gracious** as John begins salvation history as the promised forerunner of the Messiah.

Zechariah not only confirmed that the baby's name is John, but he also praised God with a special Psalm, called the **Benedictus**. The **Benedictus** is a **Berakah Prayer** of *thanksgiving to God*. Here is the part that talks about Jesus, the Messiah:

68 "**Blessed be** the Lord God of Israel, for He has **visited** and **redeemed** His people
69 and He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,
70 as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old,
71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;
72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant,
73 the oath that He swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
 might serve Him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

There are two main verbs in this section of the *Benedictus*: "**visited**" and "**redeemed**". Both words teach us what Christmas is all about.

Throughout the Old Testament, God had promised to "**visit**" His people. A **visit** from God meant His presence and power at work on their behalf. A **visit** from God meant that God was personally involved. In Jesus, God Himself **visits** His people. His presence and power was now on earth; God was personally involved in our salvation. God's **visit** to save us began when he was *conceived by the Holy Spirit* and *born of the Virgin Mary*.

The Old Testament had promised that **Immanuel** would come; Immanuel is a name that means **God with us** -- God **visits** us. The Gospel

of John teaches us about the **Incarnation**; which means *God in the flesh* – God in the flesh to **visit** us. In Jesus, God is present and His power was now on earth; God came into the world to personally save you from your sins. The Christmas story is the beginning of God's **visit** on earth to save us from our sins.

The *Benedictus* is a Messianic Psalm that transitions between the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament's Psalms only provided tantalizing glimpses of the promised Savior . . . **This Psalm has no other focus than the Savior who is about to dawn.** Aderman, p.18

The word **visit** reminds us that **Jesus is true God**; that our salvation is by grace: it is outside of us; it was achieved by God alone and never by us. Forgiveness is God's power and work; eternal life is God's free gift to us through faith in Immanuel.

The word **visit** teaches us what Christmas is;
the word *redeemed* teaches us why God came to visit us.

Redeemed is a Gospel word of salvation. It means that a price has been paid to set someone free. *Redemption* is a common way in Scripture to describe the work of Christ on our behalf. The price that Jesus would pay was His own life when He died on the cross for all people. This *redemption* set you free from your sins; this *redemption* is God's mercy to you; this *redemption* is the forgiveness of sins.

In the *Benedictus*, *redemption* is described as

being set free from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;
we are delivered from the hand of our enemies
so that we might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Your enemy is sin, guilt, and death; you have been set free from them by the *redemption* of the Lord Jesus Christ! God is compassionate to you; He paid the price Himself to set you free so that you can serve Him *in holiness and righteousness all your days.*

In the *Benedictus*, Zechariah describes the Messiah's work as a **visit** and as **redemption**. Both of these are Old Testament ways to describe God's work on our behalf. Both of these words help us to better understand what Christmas is all about.

**Jesus visits us in Bethlehem
in order to redeem us in Jerusalem.**

Zechariah's *Benedictus* reminds us that **God is faithful**; and that He keeps His word and promises. God's **visit** and **redemption** was promised throughout the Old Testament times. The salvation story is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The Lord had promised a **Messiah** to Abraham, to David, and to all the Israelites. He spoke of the Messiah through the mouths of prophets, and now God was **remembering His oath and covenant**. It is all coming true in the birth of John.

In the *Benedictus*, Zechariah describes his own son as :

a prophet of the Most High;
who you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to His people
in the forgiveness of their sins.

That is how John prepared the way; he led people to repentance and the forgiveness of their sins. He baptized them in the Messiah's Name.

Everything God had promised was coming true;
Zechariah's *Benedictus* teaches us that **God is faithful**.

When Zechariah sang his *Benedictus*, Jesus wasn't even born yet! Mary was only three months pregnant -- *and probably at Zechariah and Elizabeth's house when he sang his Benediction!* But yet, the way was being prepared for the Messiah to come! **John the Baptist** had been born, circumcised, and named. The hand of the Lord was with him. **Salvation history is unfolding on earth!**

May the *Benedictus* help prepare your way to Christ and His salvation. May you understand Christmas and the work of Christ as a **visitation** and a **redemption** from God.

**Jesus visits us in Bethlehem
in order to redeem us in Jerusalem.**

Amen!