

Our Horn of Salvation

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[0 : 00] Alright, well we are continuing on with the Gospel of Luke this morning. You're welcome to turn there in your Bibles if you have them with you. We are still in Chapter 1. It's a long chapter.

Last Sunday we heard about how Mary made the journey from Nazareth down to Judea to visit her relative Elizabeth. And we saw that sweet exchange between the two women.

Before Mary could even share the news of what was happening with her, Elizabeth declared that she was pregnant, she was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she spoke about the blessed child in Mary's womb.

And then we looked at Mary's psalm of praise to God. She was just so joyfully and deeply touched by what God was doing with her, giving this amazing gift to her, a young girl from Nazareth.

And as we heard last Sunday, Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months, and then returned home. And if we do our pregnancy math, we see that Mary came during the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy to visit Elizabeth, and then stayed about three months, and then returned home.

[1 : 18] So we don't know this for sure, but it's quite likely that she stayed with Elizabeth until just after what we're about to read today took place. So let's continue the story in Luke 1, verse 57.

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

On the eighth day, when they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father, Zechariah. But his mother spoke up and said, No, he is to be called John.

They said to her, There's no one among your relatives who has that name. Then they made signs to his father to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment, he wrote, His name is John.

Immediately, his mouth was opened, and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. So just as the angel Gabriel had said to Zechariah in the temple, Elizabeth gave birth to their baby in her old age.

[2 : 45] And just as the angel said, it was a boy, a son. And Luke describes for us the impact that this had in Elizabeth's family and in her community.

Verse 58, Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. Virtually all of our English translations of this are a little flat.

Quite literally, it says, Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord was magnifying his mercy with her, and they rejoiced with her.

That original word order puts emphasis on that word magnify. Luke's point here is that Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives recognized that this birth of Elizabeth was a huge act of the Lord's mercy to her, of the Lord's kindness to Elizabeth.

And they understood this because this child was a miracle baby. A child born to an elderly woman, as we talked about a few weeks ago.

[3 : 58] This pregnancy was a supernatural miracle of God's power. And everybody knew it. It was a very happy occasion. They rejoiced with her.

We don't know exactly how old Elizabeth was at this time, but, you know, can you imagine going to the baby shower of a 70-year-old woman? Not only that, but a woman who had cried and prayed and tried again and again for decades only to be disappointed.

And now, here she is with her son in her arms. This was a very joyful occasion. Eight days later, it was time to circumcise the child.

This was something that they did to honor the covenant that God made with Abraham long ago.

And by this time, it was customary, according to Jewish tradition, to name a son at the same time.

Not only that, but it was actually tradition to have guests attend the circumcision as witnesses and to celebrate the birth of the son at that time. It's a little different from how we do things today, many people, but that's what's happening here.

[5 : 21] So it's kind of like a birthday party, kind of like a circumcision party. And you get the sense that the family is here and they're just sort of assuming already at this point that the name of this child is going to be Zachariah after his father.

Luke says, yeah, they were going to name him after his father. You know, there's sometimes these moments that happen within the extended family. We see things like this at weddings where sometimes family members are so eager and ready to make decisions about how the wedding should go without even asking the couple themselves, what do you guys want?

How do you want it to go? Tradition can be a really powerful thing. And it was tradition to name a child after some relative.

We don't know exactly what they were thinking, but maybe they were thinking, you know, who better than Zachariah? I mean, he has fathered this miracle baby. The child ought to be named after him.

Whatever the case, you can almost imagine the awkwardness of that moment when Elizabeth finally pipes up and says, no, he's to be called John.

[6 : 38] Can you imagine the look on their faces? John. There's nobody among your relatives that has that name.

And you know, being Canadians and being polite, that's our reputation. We kind of expect that that's going to be the end of the discussion. After all, Elizabeth is the boy's mother.

If she says John, then I guess it's going to be John, right? But it almost seems as if the extended family wasn't willing to give up so easily yet. Let's ask his dad.

And surely Zachariah will be pleased to have the boy named after him. So they started making signs to his father, to Zachariah, to find out what he would like to name the child.

If you remember from earlier on in Luke's account, nine months earlier, Zachariah was told by Gabriel at the temple that he would father a son with his wife, Elizabeth.

[7 : 45] And because Zachariah did not believe the angel's words, God gave him this disciplinary consequence of not being able to speak until the day this happens.

And so that's why they're making signs to Zachariah to communicate with him because he's been mute for the past nine months and unable to speak.

Zachariah asks for a writing tablet and writes on it, his name is John. And they, the guests and family, are all astonished.

Evidently, it was quite the tradition to name the child after some relative in the family or maybe up to this point the family had just hyped it up so much that this is, we gotta call him Zachariah.

But this had them all surprised and shocked. Now again, if we think back to what Gabriel said to Zachariah nine months before this, back in Luke chapter one, verse 13, your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you are to call him John, said the angel.

[8 : 57] So this is the name that God himself picked out for this child. And this is Zachariah's moment to express obedient faith after his initial disbelief.

Naming this child, John, against tradition, against the consensus of the family is a very clear and obvious way for Zachariah to say with his actions, I believe, I now believe what the Lord said to me nine months ago about who this child will be.

His name is John. Immediately, his mouth was opened and his tongue set free and he began to speak praising God.

Again, what the angel said would happen nine months earlier just happened. He was unable to speak until it happened, until all this happened, which seems included naming John and then all of a sudden God miraculously in that moment just restores Zachariah's voice and the first thing Zachariah does with it is he begins to speak praising God, blessing God.

At this point, Luke zooms out a little bit and tells us about the reaction, not only of those at the party but also of those in the community.

[10 : 27] Verse 65, all the neighbors were filled with awe and throughout the hill country of Judea, people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, what then is this child going to be?

For the Lord's hand was with him. So the happenings of this little party caused quite the stir in the neighboring towns and hill country.

Luke says that people were talking about all these things and that word for talking is the kind of talking that often includes a back and forth like discussion and dialogue, exchanging their opinions and viewpoints as one commentary puts it.

Everyone who heard about this wondered about it, says Luke. Quite literally, they laid it upon their hearts saying, what then is this child going to be?

for the Lord's hand was with him.

[11 : 39] There was a question forming deep down inside of people after hearing this. What then is this child going to be? For the Lord's hand was with him.

Most scholars attribute this to Luke himself, the author, stating this. seems to be the answer that people were coming to as they were asking this question.

Those who heard the news of baby John's birth, they were concluding that the Lord's hand was with this child. They thought God must be doing something special with him. How else could Elizabeth have a baby in her old age?

I mean, they knew about menopause back then. It's a miracle baby. And then they heard about this strange sign with Zachariah, how he lost his speech for nine months and then just the other day he got his speech back and he was praising God.

God must be at work and it seems here Luke is saying, yes, the Lord's hand was indeed with John, just as they were suspecting.

[12 : 58] Well, Luke now goes on to share with us what Zachariah said in verses 67 to 69. We read in verse 67, his father Zachariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.

Similar to Mary's psalm that we looked at last Sunday, Zachariah now utters a poetic prophecy. And just like with Mary's utterance which we looked at last week, tradition has it that this was kind of like a hymn or a song and again, same as we looked at last Sunday with Mary's, there's nothing here in the text that indicated that Zachariah sang this.

In fact, the word for speaking or saying is present. But Luke does make it clear, explicitly clear that Zachariah spoke these words under the influence of God's Spirit.

He was filled with the Holy Spirit and then prophesied. He spoke these words. Again, just as with Mary's utterance, there could be this question of, you know, did Zachariah say this like right there at the party or was it sometime after?

And personally, I've always tended to see this as what Zachariah spoke in that moment as his tongue was set free and his lips were opened right there at the party but that maybe Luke decided to just, you know, it's a long thing.

[14 : 29] Let's not break up the flow of the narrative. Let's just put it after rather than break up the story. One more interesting observation to just notice about Zachariah's words here at the outset.

Even though Zachariah says this under the influence of God's Spirit, that doesn't mean that these words are not Zachariah's words. It's not as if God's Spirit just kind of takes over Zachariah's body and mouth such that it's no longer Zachariah thinking and speaking out of his own heart in these moments.

Look at verse 76. Zachariah says there, and you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High. This is very personal language.

I mean, he's addressing his son John here. I always imagine him actually holding the baby in his arm as he says it. I don't know if that's what happened or not. So we notice here that prophetic words, words uttered by the Spirit, need not override the mind and heart of the prophets speaking them.

Let's look now at what Zachariah said. starting in verse 68. Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

[15 : 59] He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant, David, as he said through his holy prophets of long ago. Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father, Abraham, to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

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 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of

their sins because of the tender mercy of our God by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Zachariah's outburst of praise begins with the word praise. Praise be or blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel. And then the whole rest of this is just one continuous flow of reason after reason after reason why the Lord is worthy of praise and blessing and honor.

Reason number one praise be to the Lord the God of Israel. Why? Because he has come to his people. Now it's unclear at this point just how much Zachariah understood as he said this.

I mean is he thinking you know God is drawing near he's coming he's visiting us with his aid his help in these tumultuous days. I think that by the spirit though he spoke better than he knew for in fact as the story goes on we're soon going to discover that the Lord God of Israel himself is in the womb of Mary.

[18 : 17] He has taken on human flesh and has come to dwell among us. The God of Israel has come to his people.

reason number two to praise blessed be the Lord God of Israel because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

He's come to set us free. He's come to buy us back to himself and again did Zachariah have any idea of just what this would entail?

What the price of redemption would be? what kind of setting free is Zachariah thinking about here?

We might get a sense in a moment. Reason number three praise be to the Lord the God of Israel because he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

[19 : 21] The horn of an animal symbolized the strength or power of an animal. And this language of horn was used in the Old Testament often metaphorically to refer to the powerful king of a kingdom.

And so what is Zachariah saying here? He's saying that God has raised up a strong king for us in the house of his servant David.

and the lineage of David is significant because of the promises that were made to David a thousand years earlier that a son of his would reign on his throne.

Zachariah is referring to the Messiah. God has raised up for us that great son of David whom we've been waiting for. The Messiah to be our king.

reason number four. Praise be to the Lord God of Israel because he has done all this as he said through his holy prophets of long ago.

[20 : 30] He is a God who keeps his word. The fulfillment was a long time in the coming, a long time in the waiting, but what he said he would do he has now done.

He is a faithful God and so praise be to his name. Reason number five. Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel because he has raised up a horn of salvation for us.

So he will be a powerful king who will bring about our salvation and what's perhaps a little surprising and unexpected to us here is what kind of salvation Zachariah has in mind.

We expect verse 71 to explain this salvation first and foremost as salvation from our sins, salvation from our guilt, but Zachariah is not thinking about that.

Not yet, anyway. salvation verse 71 from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

[21 : 51] Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Whenever God says something other than what we might expect, we ought to slow down.

we ought to really think about why. As I said last week, we need to remember that the idea of God as our Savior is much bigger than just salvation from sins.

I mean, salvation from sins is amazing, it's huge, it's wonderful, it's true, but God as our Savior is even more than that. there's a whole history of the people of God over millennia leading up to this where God's people, Abraham, Isaac, Israel, the children of Israel learned that God was their deliverer, God was their Savior in countless different ways and salvation or deliverance from enemies was a big way, one of the biggest ways.

think about what God did through the great king David for his people. He raised David up and through David gave his people victory over all their enemies, all around them, and they were bitter and ruthless enemies with whom there was generations of conflict and war.

those were tough years. It was under David that for the first time in centuries Israel was saved from all her enemies.

[23 : 39] And now the greater son of David, the Messiah, is here. And so what are the expectations of the faithful? No less.

And make no mistake here, we might be tempted to think that Zechariah is mistaking the kind of salvation that the Messiah has come to bring.

We might be tempted to think that Zechariah is just expecting this child of Mary's to be the one who liberates them from Roman rule. Because that's what a lot of people in Israel at that time were longing for and hoping for.

But I would suggest to you that Zechariah is not mistaken or short-sighted here. I would suggest to you that Zechariah's understanding of what the Messiah will do for his people, bringing salvation from our enemies, is precisely what God declared through the prophets centuries earlier.

We might be tempted 2,000 years later to look back on this and say, well, these enemies must be spiritual enemies. like the enemy of sin or the devil.

[24 : 50] And certainly Jesus is the one who saves us from both. But I don't think that's what Zechariah was meaning as he said this. God himself, through the prophets of old, taught his people to expect a savior who would deliver them from their enemies, their flesh and blood enemies.

And there are many passages that we could look back to in the Old Testament. For time's sake this morning, we're just going to look at one, a familiar one. Micah 5, verse 2. This is God speaking through Micah 700 years before Jesus was born.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, his God. God, and they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

[26 : 18] It goes on. And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses. We will raise against them seven shepherds, even eight commanders, who will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword.

He will deliver us from the Assyrians when they invade our land and march across our borders. This is one of those interesting passages in the Old Testament where we're left wondering, is he talking about the near future, or is he talking about the distant future?

I mean, the Assyrian Empire, that's way before Jesus came. it reached its pinnacle around the time of the prophet Micah. The Assyrians came and they conquered the northern kingdom of Israel.

They invaded the land. They marched through their fortresses way back then in the days of Micah and King Hezekiah. Israel. But this prophecy speaks of one who will be born in Bethlehem, a ruler whose greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

death. That wasn't back then. One who will cause his people to live securely. This prophecy speaks of how this ruler will come later, after the abandonment of Israel, not immediately.

[28 : 01] this prophecy speaks of how this ruler will deliver his people from the Assyrian who invades so successfully that the shepherds and commanders of Israel will rule or will crush the land of Assyria with the sword.

Well, that certainly didn't happen back in those days of Hezekiah. It seems to point to a distant future ruler or king who will save and deliver the people of Israel from those who invade and bring lasting security and peace and even dominion over the Assyrians.

Do you see how God was calling his people to hope in the ruler who would later be born in Bethlehem, 700 years later, he was calling his people to hope in him for deliverance from their flesh and blood enemies.

People, men like the Assyrians. And then after the Assyrians came the Babylonians. And then after them came the Medes and the Persians.

And then came the Greek kings and centuries of bloodshed and battle fought between the fractured provinces of the Greek empire with Israel caught right in the middle.

[29 : 27] And then came the Romans. And though we may not understand just how everything will conclude at the end of our world story, it would seem that the word of God points to future times of trouble for the people of God and to a physical earthly reign of Jesus when he returns.

an establishment of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Israel on the earth. And it seems to point even to great victories, won in battle against all the enemy opposing nations at that time.

It would seem to point to a Messiah who will be the great savior and deliverer of his people in that day at the end, both Jew and Gentile.

My purpose here is not to suggest a fully fleshed out timeline or order of events at the end, but to establish that Zechariah was right to praise God for a son of David who would bring salvation from our enemies, who would bring salvation from the hand of all who hate us.

This is a part of the story of Jesus that's still coming for all who belong to him. Listen to this expressed in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Thessalonian church, 2 Thessalonians chapter 1.

[31 : 08] Therefore among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. there's the enemies, there's those who hate us.

All this is evidence that God's judgment is right and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering. God is just.

He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled. There's the rescuing, there's salvation.

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

Salvation from all our enemies and all who hate us. This is so much in the mind and heart of Zachariah. He says it twice again in verse 74, to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

[32 : 20] What does Zachariah long for? The freedom to worship God and live before him and serve him totally unhindered.

Praise be to God. He's going to bring that about through this horn of salvation that he is now raising up in these days. He's referring of course to the child in Mary's womb.

There's so much in this Psalm of Zachariah. I'm not going to get to all of it. I'm almost out of time here. But we notice some of the things that are repeated, the things that are emphasized. Verse 72, to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham.

Praise be to the Lord God of Israel for he is faithful. He promised long ago and now he's keeping his promises through this Savior that he is raising up.

And just like with Mary in her psalm, we see it here in Zachariah's too. Zachariah recognizes that this child, this king, will be the one through whom the promises made to Abraham long ago, will be fulfilled.

[33 : 39] That covenant that God made with Abraham long ago wasn't just an Old Testament thing. It wasn't just part of a bygone dispensation. This is something that God is making good on right now with the birth of this son, this horn of salvation that he is now raising up, Jesus.

Zachariah goes on in verse 76 to talk about how his son, John, the role that he will play in all this. He will prepare the people as a prophet. In verse 77, he will be the one, John will, to give the Lord's people the knowledge of salvation.

salvation through the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God. John's role will be to give the Lord's people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. So there's two salvations spoken of by Zachariah. There's from enemies and now we hear from sins. the one that we're most familiar with.

[35 : 01] Salvation from the punishment that we deserve from God because of our sins. John will get to declare this wonderful news that God is ready and eager to forgive.

To forgive even sinners, those who have done wrong done wrong by him. And why? Because of his tender mercy.

He is a merciful God. Beneath those words is the idea that God has a merciful heart. That down in the very depths of who he is, the very heart of his being, he is merciful.

And so John, he is raising up as a prophet to tell us how we might find that forgiveness for our sins and how we might be delivered, saved from what we truly deserve from God.

Zachariah ends this psalm of praise with this very poetic statement moment of how God's mercy is coming to us in this moment in human history. He says it's like the sun in all its goodness and brilliance and warmth.

[36 : 31] It's like the sun is rising and beginning to shine into the darkness and shadow of our existence here in this world. And the light of his mercy as it's rising over our world is now illuminating something that we could scarcely see before.

The path of peace by his mercy we can now see it. We can now walk in it.

The path of true everlasting peace with God. These are amazing words. Luke closes this section with a brief statement of how it went with little baby John in verse 80.

And the child grew and became strong in spirit or in the spirit and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

That would be 30 years later. So Elizabeth recognized it. Mary recognized it.

[37 : 42] Zechariah recognized it. he recognizes what God is doing through this child of Mary's to be born. And it's amazing. He says the Lord has come to us to redeem us, to save us, to forgive us, to deliver us one day from all our enemies, to make good on that ancient promise he made to Abraham, to bring us closely back into relationship with him so that we can serve him and live before him without fear.

And he's doing all this because he is a faithful God and because he is truly to the core of his being merciful.

Do you recognize it? Do your eyes see this great dawn of salvation? Can you see the path to peace?

Can you see the path to peace? It all centers around this child, this son of David, Jesus. Let's pray. Father in heaven, I pray that you would grip our hearts so deeply with your goodness and kindness to us. We do not deserve this. We do not deserve this. We have all blown it in so many ways we can't even keep track.

[39 : 17] And yet you have loved us by sending your son, by coming to redeem us. Thank you.

Touch our hearts deeply with this, Lord, and I pray that if there's anyone in this room who has not seen and felt your mercy and your love for them personally, that they would know it today.

We ask this in your name. Amen. Amen.