
*ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE
COMING SAVIOR
LUKE 1:5-80*

Luke's purpose was to provide a comprehensive narrative of the life of Jesus. He began his story with the very helpful background of the angel's announcements to Zechariah and Mary of the coming births of John the Baptist and Jesus. This chapter reminds us that God keeps His promises.

The Announcement to Zechariah — Luke 1:5-25

⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on

the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness,

and many will rejoice at his birth;

¹⁵for he will be great before the Lord,

and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink,

and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit,

even from his mother's womb.

¹⁶And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God,

¹⁷and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah,

to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,

and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,

to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

¹⁸And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹And the angel answered him "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. ²⁰And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." ²¹And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. ²²And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb. ²³And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, ²⁵"Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."

1:5-7. Herod the Great had built the magnificent temple and many other impressive buildings. His insane jealousy and cruelty led him to kill many, including some of his family. He died in March, 4 B.C., unmourned.

The priests were organized into orders. Zechariah was a member of the order of Abijah. He had a special privilege of being married to a descendant of Aaron, Elizabeth. Zechariah means "the Lord remembers" (His covenant) and Elizabeth means "God is the faithful one." They represent the best in Jewish faith and devotion toward

God and moral piety. They were "righteous" and "blameless."

Elizabeth was childless. No doubt they had frequently prayed that God would remove their reproach. "They had waited together these many years, till in the evening of life the flower of hope had closed its fragrant cup" (Edersheim, Vol. I, p. 137). They faced the twilight of their years in contentment and not in bitterness. The superintending priest was one in his mature years (Edersheim, Vol. I, p. 137).

1:8-10. Of the thousands of priests only a few were on duty at the temple at a given time. The duties of the day were chosen by lot. The burning of the incense was a once-in-a-lifetime privilege and a solemn experience. Zechariah entered the Holy Place and offered the incense on the altar. The people prayed in the court, outside the Holy Place, while he was inside.

1:11-13. As Zechariah attended the altar suddenly an angel of God appeared and stood on the right side of the altar. Zechariah was afraid — the usual response of those in Scripture who received a supernatural visit. The angel told him not to be afraid because their prayer was heard and they would have a child named John. What prayer? For a son or for the redemption of Israel through the Messiah? Zechariah no doubt had prayed for both. The prayer he prayed that day would be probably for the coming Messiah. Their son would have a key role in the coming of the Messiah. They would not need to deliberate about a name for the son, because the angel said, "You shall call his name John" (1:13). The name John means "The Lord is merciful."

1:14-17. The presence of a baby in the formerly quiet, childless home would bring them "joy and gladness." God had not spoken through a prophet for centuries. Many will rejoice with renewed expectations at his birth. He would be great in importance and in goodness. Jesus said of John, "Among those born of woman there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). The text does not say John would be a Nazarite but he shared the common quality of refraining from wine and strong drink. The Holy Spirit would not come upon him periodically but would abide with him permanently from his beginning of life. John as a prophet would declare God's truth and challenge many of his people to turn to God to obey His truth.

Malachi had predicted, "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before me . . . Behold, I am going to send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers

to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse” (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6, NASB). Later Jesus said of John, “If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matt. 11:14. See also Matt. 17:10-13). John shared in common with Elijah a strength of character, empowerment by the spirit, and a message of divine judgment. John’s preaching would challenge men to moral renewal and arouse an expectancy for the coming Kingdom.

1:18-20. This promise of a baby son was more than Zechariah could believe. He did not deny it but he asked for some kind of evidence or proof. He knew enough biology to know Elizabeth was past her child-bearing years. It did not seem humanly possible. “How shall I know this?” (1:18).

To establish his authority and authenticity the angel responds with directness, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news” (1:19). Zechariah had looked at the matter from a human, earthly point of view. Gabriel made it clear he brought his message of good news directly from God. Zechariah did not receive the kind of sign he imagined. Because he did not trust the word of the angel, he would not be able to speak until the promise was fulfilled. No doubt he was reminded of his lack of faith many times a day for the next nine months whenever he wanted to say something to his wife or to others.

1:21-23. The people outside grew concerned at Zechariah’s prolonged stay inside the Holy Place. When he came out and was unable to speak, they concluded he had seen some kind of a vision. Zechariah stayed in Jerusalem until his order of priests was off duty. Then he went to his home which was in the hill country of Judea. Tradition identifies the town as Juttah.

1:24-25. After Elizabeth conceived she kept herself out of public society for five months. It would have been difficult to convince her neighbors that her good news was true. Even if those early months were lonely, she had the great satisfaction that God had taken away her reproach of barrenness.

The Announcement to Mary, Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Hail, O favored one, the Lord

is with you!"²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be.³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?"

³⁵And the angel said to her,

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

³⁶And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible."³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

1:26-27. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy Gabriel visited Mary in Nazareth. In the central mountainous area of southern Galilee is nestled the small town of Nazareth. It was one of the most unlikely places for the Messiah to be raised from the viewpoint of the leading Jews in Jerusalem. They viewed with contempt the unlettered country people from Galilee. But God had a different estimate of Mary, a young virgin who was legally engaged to be married to Joseph, a carpenter and a descendant of David.

1:28-33. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary near the village spring, according to tradition. He greeted her, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" This does not mean that Mary is full of divine favor so that she can grant that favor to others, but it means she has received God's favor as Gabriel explained in 1:30. Bengel observed that Mary's favor was "not as the mother of grace, but as the daughter of grace." Mary was apprehensive and curious about the angelic visit. Gabriel urged her not to be afraid because God had favored her, and she would conceive and bear a son. Several characteristics of the child are listed: named Jesus, will be great, called Son of the Most High, will restore the throne of David, will rule over

the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will never end.

1:34-35. This amazing news seemed incomprehensible to Mary but she did not doubt, nor did she ask for a sign. She merely asked about the manner in which this promise will be fulfilled. Instead of demanding proof she requested more information. She knew how babies started and she had had no sexual relations with a man. The angel explained that the origin of this child would be divine and not human. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" and "the power of the Most High will overshadow you" restate the idea that God will supernaturally bring about the conception. Her child would be called holy because of his moral perfection, and the son of God because of His deity.

1:36-38. Mary asked for no proof but in a sense she received an objective confirmation — Elizabeth's pregnancy in her old age. The *King James Version* says Elizabeth was Mary's cousin. The Greek word is not that specific, *relative* or *kinswoman* would be a better translation. Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy. God is able to do whatever He wills to do.

Mary trusted the angel's word and submitted completely to the will of God, "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (1:38). Did she think of the social stigma and ridicule of those in the community? What would Joseph do when he learned she was pregnant? She left this matter in God's hands. He did not disappoint her. He informed Joseph of the facts (Matthew 1:18-25).

Mary Visits Elizabeth, Luke 1:39-56

³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

⁴⁶And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰And his mercy is on those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,

⁵²he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;

⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.

⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers,

to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”

⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.

1:39-45. The trip from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea would have been over 100 miles if Mary took the route on the east of the Jordan River bypassing Samaria, which was the route commonly taken by Jews of the first century. When Mary entered the house she greeted Elizabeth. The babe in Elizabeth’s womb made an unusual movement. The babe leaped for joy. Elizabeth’s response was spoken under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. She continued the theme voiced by Gabriel earlier. Mary is highly favored, greatly benefited and really well off in relationship to other women. Also the one born to her is highly favored. Expressing her feeling of unworthiness rather than asking for an answer, she said, “Why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (1:43). Those who have unduly elevated Mary have said she is the mother of God. She was the mother of the Lord Jesus in his earthly sojourn but to say she is the mother of God is misleading. Elizabeth was happy to acknowledge the greater honor afforded to her relative. With no sign of jealousy Elizabeth put herself in the background and honored Mary. Zechariah was daily reminded of his unbelief. Elizabeth blessed Mary for believing the angel’s promise would be fulfilled. Nothing in this text encourages us to worship Mary but we should all follow her example in implicitly trusting the Word of God.

1:46-50. Mary’s beautiful, lyrical hymn of praise is often called the Magnificat from the first word in the Latin Vulgate version. It weaves together many Old Testament quotations including thirty words or

phrases from the Old Testament (Butler, p. 16). It is an exalted expression of worship. "My soul" and "my spirit" (1:46-47) are used synonymously. Mary "wholeheartedly and from the depths of her being magnifies and glorifies God" (N. Geldenhuys, p. 88). Compare Mary's praise with that offered by Hannah at the birth of Samuel (I Sam. 2:1-10).

Mary expressed worship and gratitude because God so highly favored her, a simple Galilean peasant girl. She knew future generations of believers would call her "blessed" because of her role in the coming of the Messiah. The one "who is mighty" would bring about this supernatural conception in this young virgin girl. She praised God for His holiness of character and for His mercy on those who in godly fear respect and honor Him throughout the generations.

1:51-55. She continued the theme of God's power and His favor to the humble. God shatters the dreams and imagined greatness of the proud and arrogant. Those who trust in earthly power will be brought low. Those who are humble and hungry for God will be filled with good things. Those who consider themselves rich, with no need of God, He sends away empty of the things that really matter. She concluded the hymn with mention of God's help to His people Israel, and His faithful speaking to the fathers, to Abraham and his descendants. She expressed a calm trust in the promises of God.

1:56. Mary spent three months with Elizabeth. What a wonderful visit they must have had together. No one else in all the world would have had the sympathetic understanding they had for each other because of sharing in common their similar secrets. Perhaps Mary returned home in Nazareth just before the birth of John thus avoiding the crowd that that event would bring.

The Birth of John the Baptist 1:57-80

⁵⁷Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰but his mother said, "Not so; and he shall be called John."⁶¹And they said to her, "None of your kindred is called by this name."⁶²And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. ⁶³And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marveled. ⁶⁴And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵And fear came on all their neighbors. And all

these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; ⁶⁶and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has visited and redeemed his people,

⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us;

⁷²to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, ⁷⁴to grant us
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,

⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

⁷⁶And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸through the tender mercy of our God,
when the day shall dawn upon us from on high

⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of
death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace."

⁸⁰And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

1:57-61. Elizabeth gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives joined in unrestrained rejoicing because God showed mercy to her by giving her a son. The eighth day was the usual day for the circumcising and naming of a Jewish boy. The neighbors thought he should be named Zechariah, after his father. Elizabeth objected and stated with definiteness, "Not so; he shall be called John" (1:60). They argued with her that none of their relatives were named John.

1:62-64. By making hand signs they asked Zechariah's opinion on the baby's name. Gabriel had not told him he would be deaf as well as unable to speak. We wonder why they had to communicate with signs if he could hear. Zechariah asked for a writing tablet, probably a flat

piece of wood covered with wax upon which one made marks with a stylus. The matter was not open to debate. "His name is John" (1:63). God had spoken through the angel and Zechariah was glad to accept. The people were genuinely surprised at this. At the moment of his believing obedience to the angel's word, Zechariah's ability to speak was given back. He first used his tongue to praise God.

1:65-66. These amazing events brought godly fear into the hearts of their friends. Conversation about them was heard throughout the hill country of Judea. As they considered these things they wondered what God had planned for this boy because they had seen the power of God active in the events surrounding John's birth.

1:67-69. Zechariah expressed his worship in a great hymn of praise spoken prophetically by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It has been called the *Benedictus*.

Zechariah praised God for His redemptive plan which centered in the Savior. "Blessed be the Lord" expresses praise and honor to God. As in the Old Testament prophecies, future events are spoken in past tense: "has visited and redeemed." The birth of Jesus, then a few weeks away, was the fulfillment of Zechariah's words. After all those silent centuries God now was sending the Messiah to save His people. *Horn* symbolizes power. God's saving power is found in the son born to that daughter of David, Mary of Nazareth.

1:70-71. The promises of God pointing toward the Messiah pervade the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 3:15 and continuing through the book of Malachi. God spoke these prophecies through His inspired spokesmen, the prophets. Zechariah has more in mind than the political overthrow of enemy nations. The real role of the Savior was to bring victory over the spiritual adversaries.

1:72-73. Jesus expressed the lovingkindness and tender mercy of God toward those who accepted Him. God had not forgotten the plight nor the prayers of His people. He kept His part of the covenant made with Abraham when God promised that in Abraham all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). God later restated this promise to Abraham and to his descendants.

1:74-75. The Savior brought spiritual freedom from the fear of men. Thus men can obey and serve God with a singleminded devotion to please God; can seek to be like Him in character and conduct; can be in a right relationship with Him. The fullest salvation includes serving the Lord "all the days of our life."

1:76. While verses 68-75 praise God for the Savior, verses 76-79 speak of John, the forerunner of Jesus. Zechariah now spoke of the

role his son would play in God's plan. Jesus later said that John was more than a prophet. He identified John as the forerunner predicted by the Old Testament prophets. He asserted that no one born of woman before the kingdom was greater than John the Baptist (Luke 7:25-28). John was not the redeemer but was to announce the coming of the Redeemer. His work was to prepare the people to expect and anticipate the soon arrival of the Messiah.

1:77-79. Since most Jews of Jesus' day looked for a political King, John needed to stress the spiritual aspect, forgiveness of man's sins, as the true nature of the Redeemer's work.

The promise of verse 77 was possible because of God's tender mercy. The "dayspring" is promised in Isaiah 9:2; 60:1; Malachi 4:2.

Those outside of God's will are in the darkness of confusion and the dread of death. Christ points the way to light and to peace with God.

1:80. John grew and matured physically and spiritually. He spent much time in the wilderness before he began his public preaching. The word "desert" in some translations here means uninhabited area.

Trusting the Promises of God

The living God will always keep His word. In the Old Testament and in this chapter God made many predictions about the coming Redeemer. The theme of promise and fulfillment in God's dealings with man in the drama of human history thrills the heart. Our Redeemer has brought hope to the hopeless, peace to the troubled, forgiveness to the guilty, purpose to the drifting. Let us "Praise Him." "To God be the glory. Great things He hath done!"

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Luke began his Gospel with the stories of what two angelic announcements?
2. Identify the Herod in 1:5.
3. Describe Zechariah and Elizabeth.
4. What prayer of Zechariah was heard?
5. Malachi and Jesus identified John the Baptist as what Old Testament prophet?
6. What happened to Zechariah because he did not believe the word of the angel?
7. Name the angel who appeared to Zechariah and to Mary.

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON LUKE

8. Did Mary doubt the word of the angel?
9. How far was the trip from Nazareth to the home of Elizabeth?
10. What should be our attitude today toward Mary, the mother of Jesus?
11. What made the visit of Mary with Elizabeth such a blessing to each?
12. Why and when did Zechariah regain his ability to speak?
13. Zechariah in his hymn of praise speaks mainly of what two persons?
14. What does it mean to your life to know that God always keeps His word?