

# GOD HAS COME TO REDEEM HIS PEOPLE

Luke 1:39-80

Key verse 68

**“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.”**

Merry Christmas! Before we hear the Christmas story in chapter 2, Luke gives us the story of Mary, a teenage country girl, and Zechariah, a saintly elder. Both sing songs of praise and glory to God: called the “Magnificat” and the “Benedictus,” and they have been commemorated down through Christian history. Why were they so inspired and happy? People are happy to have children. People are happy to have God’s calling and purpose. People are happy to receive God’s favor. These two very different people experienced all this. But I think that was just the wrapping on the Christmas present. The real reason for them and for us to have a merry Christmas is this: In Jesus Christ, God, the Lord, has come to us, and he has redeemed us. It is a very busy time. Please sit back and listen to the word of God and find rest for your soul, and a clear reason to be merry this Christmas.

**First, “My soul glorifies the Lord” (39-56).** Mary had received God’s call through an angel, and made a great decision by faith to obey God’s will. The direction of her life had now radically changed. She had many questions, and needed help with the practical details. What did Mary do? **“At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.”** She didn’t go to Joseph, or her family, or friends. Why go to Elizabeth? She wanted a spiritual mentor. From the angel she knew God was working in Elizabeth. Our culture today is heavily influenced by the Greek style of education, centered on classrooms and curriculum. We have forgotten the crucial need for mentors. We think we can learn everything on our own, and if that fails, we can just google it, or watch a youtube video. This works ok for preparing Bible study or changing the belt on your clothes’ dryer. But I don’t think that works for spiritual mentoring. Would you like someone to help you process God’s calling and direction on your life? There are many who are filled with the Holy Spirit, and ready to receive you. Mary didn’t ask anything, yet she was helped. Let’s take initiative and reach out.

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**“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?’”** How to help someone who comes to us for counsel? Humanly, Mary was an unwed, pregnant teenager who had run away from home. Elizabeth was a saintly elderly woman. They were quite different. But the Holy Spirit helped Elizabeth to see this situation in the right perspective. She blessed Mary and baby Jesus in the womb. Elizabeth felt honored and blessed to serve Mary, without even a single negative comment. Even baby John in the womb was full of joy to hear Mary’s voice (44). With the help of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth shared with Mary the best advice: **“Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her (45)!”** Mary and Elizabeth became a blessing to each other, and both were encouraged through their relationship.

It is one thing to hear from another person: “You are so blessed!” But can we say: “I am so blessed!” Mary’s body was carrying out God’s will obediently, changing to accommodate the Son of God in utero, but what about her inner person? Look at verses 46-55, beginning: **“And Mary said: ‘My Soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.’”** She was so thankful, blessed and happy. Why? Her situation hadn’t changed. But as Elizabeth had counseled, she believed that the Lord would do as he promised. Thinking about that, she saw herself as so blessed, that God would be mindful and save her, use her, and fulfill his promises in her. She thought about God’s beautiful character as holy, mighty, merciful and faithful. Her song was her statement that she loved God not just with her body’s actions, but with her soul and spirit too. How about you? Can you say: “I am so blessed”?

This past year God gave us our fourth son, Matthew (8 mo). People always tell me: “Four sons! You are so blessed!” I smile and agree. To be honest, I really didn’t feel blessed. Matthew doesn’t sleep well at night, often waking every hour or less. This has taken a great toll on our family, especially since Amy went back to work. For the first time I felt regret for so many kids. In the early hours, holding Matthew, I’d pray, “God, why are you torturing me?” When people ask me, “How

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are you?” I say, “I’m tired.” But through studying Mary’s song, I came to a realization that I’m so blessed, not because of my beautiful family but because in Jesus, God has been mindful of me. I can say, “Yes, I am blessed.” I hope you too may be able to say it.

**Second, “Praise be to the Lord” (57-80).** Elizabeth gave birth to a son, just as the angel had said (57). Her neighbors and relatives recognized God’s great mercy, and shared her joy (58). Following their culture and family tradition, they came on the eighth day to circumcise the boy and name him, “Zechariah,” after his father. But Elizabeth protested, **“No! He is to be called John (60).”** Zechariah had been made mute by an angel as discipline for his unbelief (20). But he asked for a writing tablet and also wrote: **“His name is John (63).”** They did this because they wanted to obey God’s message through the angel, but the family really didn’t understand. In order to obey God, there will be times we have to go against the influence of culture and our family. We are tempted to think, “If I compromise, they will see how sensible and cool I am, and then I will be able to share God’s truth.” But when Zechariah and Elizabeth went against tradition and culture to obey God, God himself testified through them. Immediately Zechariah’s mouth was opened and he began to speak, praising God (64). The people all began to talk about what God was doing in this family, and a sense of wonder and anticipation grew: “What then is this child going to be?”

When Zechariah’s mouth was opened, he praised God. I heard a story about a North Korean man who, after successful cataract surgery said: “Praise Kim Jong-Il who restored my sight!” Zechariah’s praise was different. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and his song is actually a prophecy (67). This is God’s message to us. Let’s read verse 68. **“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.”** This is why we say, “Merry Christmas.” We could not visit God due to sin. So Almighty God left the glory of heaven to come to us. He didn’t knock on our door to ask us, “Have you thought about your eternal destiny?” and leave some literature. He put on flesh and made his dwelling among us (Jn 1:14). The stories of Jesus in the gospel accounts show us the beautiful life of God with us. For example, there was a widow who had lost her only son. As the funeral procession was leaving the town, Jesus entered. When Jesus saw the widow his heart went out to her, and he said, **“Don’t cry.”** Jesus

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raised the boy back to life, saying, “**Young man, I say to you, get up!**” and returned him to his mother. The people said, “**God has come to help his people (Lk 7:11-17).**” God came to us, as humanity, and as individuals, in the person of Jesus, who understands us, comforts us, heals us, HELPS us. Praise be to the Lord who has come to his people!

Primarily, Zechariah saw how Jesus’ coming was to redeem his people. Redeeming someone is to buy them out of slavery. With God he has a purpose in doing so. We see the example in God redeeming his people out of slavery in Egypt to be his chosen people (Ex 6:6). The Holy Spirit helped Zechariah to describe Jesus’ redeeming work through the symbol of a horn of salvation and the rising sun.

**Firstly, the horn of salvation (69-75).** Look at verses 69-75. “**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.**” A horn of salvation is a mighty king, a descendant of David, the promised Messiah who would destroy all the enemies of Israel and establish an eternal reign. Jesus is the Messiah, and he is powerful. But he didn’t use his power as expected. Rather, he uses his power to save us.

Did you know you have enemies? That is why we need salvation. These enemies tempt us to turn away from Jesus. They persecute us when we try to live by faith. Ungodly institutions, tyrannical governments. Sometimes our enemies are closer to home, like family members, coworkers, even roommates. Sometimes even people in our Christian fellowship seem like our enemies. Why is that? We have to know that people are not the real enemy. Our enemy is the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1Pe 5:8). Then he uses them as his hands to hurt others. Apostle John describes him as a dragon with seven heads and ten horns, symbolizing his overwhelming cunning and strength (Rev 12:3). He lies and manipulates with the goal of killing you (Jn 8:44).

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How do people become the tool of Satan to harm us? While on earth, Jesus was raising his disciples to believe he is the Messiah. When asked directly, his top disciple Peter confessed clearly: **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”** Jesus then began to teach them that the Messiah must suffer, be killed, and then rise again. Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him: **“Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!”** **Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!”** (paraphrase of Mt 16:16-23a) Was Peter really Satan? No, but because he was thinking only about Jesus humanly, his words became the voice of Satan to Jesus. In this way, Satan uses our family, friends, unbelieving people, worldly power and structures, the media, internet, etc... to attack, wound, demoralize and at times kill Jesus people. And we often don't see what is really going on because Satan is so devious and crafty.

But worse than the devil outside, is the devil inside. Turn the tables around: sometimes we are like Peter rebuking Jesus, aren't we? We find ourselves suffering from anxiety, fear, guilt due to transgressions and sins, despair over our iniquity. We become entrenched in besetting sins of laziness, pride, lust, the list goes on. We know what is right, and we want to do it. We want to serve God, but are too weak. Like Paul cried out in Romans 7, so we cry out: **“What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”** The only answer Paul could come to is this: **“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”** God knew that we could never defeat this enemy on our own. That is why he came to us in Jesus Christ, to rescue us and to enable us to serve him. He enables us through his blood that was shed to forgive our sins. He defeated our enemies by taking the punishment for our sins upon himself, effecting our salvation through his sacrifice.

We need Jesus, our mighty redeemer every day. When we feel wounded by other people's actions or words, the devil is ready to use it to divide and destroy. When we sin, the devil is ready to crush us with self-condemnation. When we want to serve God, fear is right there, especially the fear of death. What can we do? At that time we need to remember that we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus. God has raised up a mighty hero to deliver us. We need him. Then we may serve the Lord without fear in holiness and righteousness all our days, the very thing we wanted to do but were not able. As we are preparing Christmas worship service,

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let's depend not on our own meager strength, but on our Mighty King, our horn of salvation.

**Secondly, the rising sun (76-80).** Zechariah pointed out the mission of his son John was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. He would prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah by giving his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Practically, John's ministry was pretty fire and brimstone: pointing out people's sins and calling them to repent (3:7-14). But people came out in droves, especially those who had sinned. Why? John's message of salvation had weight for sinners because in the gospel there is the forgiveness of sins. This gave hope to sinners, who under the law were always crushed. Our sins are forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the lamb of God. Jesus died for sinners, of whom I am the worst. He didn't wait for us to clean up our act; he laid down his life as the expression of God's mercy and love.

Jesus' coming is like a rising sun: steady, sure, powerful, broad, dispelling darkness. Jesus as the rising sun really does two things for us. Shines on those living in darkness. Darkness as a symbol has many meanings, and none of them are good. The darkness of ignorance, depression, fatalism, habitual religion, directionless life, sorrow, fear of death, perhaps others. Continuing in this darkness leads to bondage to sin and fear, iniquity and shame that trap us, and we can't get out. We need Jesus, the rising sun to shine and dispel all our darkness. One wonderful thing about Jesus is this: When in the darkness of night, we have to wait for the earth to finish its rotation before the sun comes again. But Jesus' rising sun doesn't come up, but comes from heaven. I think it means that since Jesus' light is spiritual, it can illuminate in an instant. This is practical. Our problems, when we keep them inside, cripple us. But when we confess, bringing it into the light, we can see how small they are in the light of his wonderful grace. Jesus is able to heal us, dispel the darkness and give us life.

Jesus as the rising sun also guides our feet into the path of peace. Several years ago I visited the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Fortunately we had a guide, who took us around explaining so many things. If it were not for the guide explaining, I would surely have been lost. Jesus never leaves us, but guides us throughout our lifetime for his good purpose. He was there on the cross, to bring

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about our justification. His is with us now, bearing with us, strengthening and comforting while bringing about our sanctification. And he will be there to receive us at glorification. Through it all he is with us. Knowing this, like David we have peace while we travel the path the Lord guides us on, even through the valley of the shadow of death.

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. Let's remember we are redeemed in Jesus, and belong to him. Let's call out to Jesus to save and rescue us, to shine and guide us, whatever the issue is. May God bless you and your family with a Merry Christmas.