

**Series, Retold—The Christmas Story**  
**Retold By Zechariah**  
Luke 1:5-25 & 57-80  
December, 2019

**No Sermon Outline — First-Person Narrative**

Luke 1:5-25

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Luke 1:57-80

The Birth of John the Baptist

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

#### Zechariah's Song

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

69 He has raised up a horn[a] of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David

70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

71 salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—

72 to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,

73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear

75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

76 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,

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

78 because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

79 to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace."

80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit[b]; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

## Soul Food Day 1

### The Prayers of the Saints and the Burning Incense

#### Scripture

Luke 1:8-10

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Revelation 8:1-5

1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.  
2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.  
3 Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

#### **Prayers are like the smoke that goes up to the throne of God through the burning of incense, a pleasing aroma to God.**

The utterly astonishing thing about this text is that it portrays the prayers of the saints as the instrument God uses to usher in the end of the world with great divine judgments. It pictures the prayers of the saints accumulating on the altar before the throne of God until the appointed time when they are taken up like fire from the altar and thrown upon the earth to bring about the consummation of God's kingdom.

In other words, what we have in this text is an explanation of what has happened to the millions upon millions of prayers over the last 2,000 years as the saints have cried out again and again, "Thy kingdom come . . . Thy kingdom come." Not one of these prayers, prayed in faith, has been ignored. Not one is lost or forgotten. Not one has been ineffectual or pointless. They have all been gathering on the altar before the throne of God.

And the flame has been growing brighter and brighter and more and more pleasing in the presence of God. And the time will come when God will command his holy angel to take his mighty censer and fill it with fire from the altar where the prayers burn before the Lord, and pour it out on the world to bring all God's great and holy purposes to completion. Which means that the consummation of history will be owing to the supplication of the saints who cry to God day and night. Not one God-exalting prayer has ever been in vain.

This is an astonishing tribute to the enormous historical importance of prayer. Now let me stand back with you and see that this is so. Let's go back and get the flow of John's thought in front of us before we look in more detail at the text.

**God Has Preserved All the Prayers of All the Saints In the Burning Incense of Jesus Christ, the High priest.**

## **Application**

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
- What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
- What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
- Now talk to Jesus...

Adopted from John Piper. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-prayers-of-the-saints-and-the-end-of-the-world#prayer-and-the-consummation-of-history-nbsp>

## Soul Food Day 2

### Speechless Wonder

#### Scripture

Luke 1:5-25

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

#### **Barrenness was considered a humiliation and even God's punishment.**

Zechariah served as a priest in the Jerusalem Temple. One of the duties of the priests was to keep the brazier burning that stood on the altar of incense in front of the Holy of Holies. They would fill the brazier with fresh incense before the morning sacrifice, and again at the evening sacrifice. It was during such an occasion that God's messenger, Gabriel, appears and foretells the birth of John the Baptist. Later, when his wife Elizabeth, against all odds, finds herself pregnant, she proclaims, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people." Barrenness was considered a humiliation and even God's punishment.

Zechariah had been chosen by lot from the hundreds of available priests, to offer incense for the Jewish nation. His childlessness, the great grief of his life, would have been on his mind as he prayed. The

revelation that he would be the father of a special child was such an answer to prayer as to strike him speechless.

**As you contemplate this scene, are you ever awed by the great things God has done for you during your life?**

### **Application**

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
- What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
- What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
- Now talk to Jesus...

Adopted from Sacred Space. <https://www.sacredspace.ie/scripture/luke-15-25#>

## Soul Food Day 3

Retold by Elizabeth

### Scripture

Luke 5:24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

### **There is great mystery in the divine providence of God.**

The sovereign God behind the scenes wants to reveal to us, by means of this historical narrative, that we must take on board the truth that there are things that are visible and things that are invisible. He wants us to see that there is fallen mankind, and unfallen, elect angels. He wants to reveal to us that there is the possibility of our heartache and our sorrow being turned to joy. Those who are barren can, in fact, by the sovereign power of God, bring forth children! Those who are sad and downcast can, by God's kindness, have their heads lifted and their joy restored!

This God wants to show us that He is willing and able to meet the needs of individuals and nations. He wants to call us to patience and to perseverance. Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for many years for a child, and just when they had begun to give up hope God graciously swooped in to answer their prayers. This story is surely an illustration of David's promise: "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).

We dare not expect that God give us exactly what we demand. Not all missing pets are returned safe and sound. Criminals do not always stop in their tracks when it is a Christian they are attempting to harm. Cancer doesn't always go into remission. Barrenness does not always give way to the joy of childbirth.

There is great mystery in the divine providence of God. Nonetheless, we are invited to delight ourselves in the Lord, and to anticipate with great hope that He will give us the desires of our heart. Perhaps that will entail that He will first change our desires so that we will no longer desire that which we once desired. Perhaps there is need for us to not set our desires on those things which bring us such sadness, disappointment and loss. Perhaps we need to look beyond those desires and see greater things on the other side. Perhaps we need to come to the point where we see our circumstances as a blessing rather than a curse.

These historical facts give us the hope of the gift of the Spirit. They show us that God uses means and messengers to prepare the way for the Messiah. In a broken world, the only way to find wholeness and lasting satisfaction is to come to put our faith in the Messiah, for whom John would prepare the way. John came to prepare the way; the one who came after John—Jesus Christ—is the way. He deserves our response.

Here we have a story of a barren woman who was to have a son. Her son would prepare the way for the Messiah. That Messiah came. He lived, He died and He rose again from the dead. He then ascended to the right hand of the Father, where today He intercedes for all those who have faith in Him. There He prepares a place for all those who believe in Him. And when He comes, He will come to fetch those who are waiting for Him.

Are you one who waits for Him? Let this historical narrative encourage you to see how great a Saviour Zechariah and Elizabeth's baby would prepare the way for. Let us be enthralled with Him, and let us put our faith in Him afresh. Let us pray for revival in the world and in our own hearts, and as we do so, let us patiently pray for God to bless us and the world for the sake of His Son.

**There is a better day ahead as we use the means that God has given to us.  
Let us, by faith, pray and work to this end for the glory of God.**

### **Application**

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
- What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
- What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
- Now talk to Jesus...

Adopted from <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/devotional-lessons-from-luke-15-25/>

## Soul Food Day 4

### Hilarious Light of Glory

#### Scripture

Luke 1:57-80

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

#### When God gets involved in our lives things often take turns we hadn't anticipated

When God gets involved in our lives things often take turns we hadn't anticipated. And though perhaps not all that funny in the moment, our halting, often stumbling attempts to navigate the new terrain God's promise has laid before us will, at a distance, appear even – and maybe especially – to us as humorous. Zechariah, once he regained his voice, no doubt looked back at his time on silence, shook his head, and chuckled to himself and his bride, "And to think I asked Gabriel how all this could happen."

There is an ancient Christian hymn – actually, the oldest hymn we know outside the the Bible – often sung as part of evening prayer called the Phos Hilaron, a transliteration of the Greek often rendered as "gladdening light" or "joyous light." But the word we translate as "gladdening" or "joyous" is also the root of our word "hilarious." (So also in the Latin version, Lumen Hilare.) Which means that we might sing this song of praise to the "hilarious light of glory."

Why did the early Christians choose such a peculiar song with which to end their days? Because they recognized, I think, that along with the wonder and excitement that comes to those who witness God's activity in their lives always comes a bit of confusion, as things work out in ways we'd never expected, and eventually laughter, the hilarious laughter of those who have seen God choose an old woman to bear the herald of the Messiah, a young virgin to give birth to the Son of God, and an executed criminal born in a stable to redeem the world. Hilarious, indeed.

Prayer: Dear God, never stop surprising us with your grace and mercy. Because while it may confuse us at first, we need the laughter and joy your presence always brings. In Jesus' name, Amen.

From the Service for Evening Prayer (Vespers), the Lutheran Book of Worship:

Joyous light of glory  
of the immortal Father,  
Heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ,  
We have come to the setting of the Sun

And we look to the evening light.  
We sing to God, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.  
You are worthy of being praised with pure voices forever.  
O Son of God, O Giver of Light,  
The universe proclaims your glory.

**When God gets involved in our lives things often take turns we hadn't anticipated.**

### **Application**

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
- What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
- What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
- Now talk to Jesus...

Adopted from <https://www.davidlose.net/2012/12/luke-1-57-66/>

## Soul Food Day 5

### Zechariah's Hymn: Benedictus

#### Scripture

Luke 1:67-80

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

69 He has raised up a horn[c] of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David

70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

71 salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—

72 to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,

73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear

75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

76 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,

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

78 because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

79 to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace."

80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit[d]; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

#### **This hymn surveys God's plan through the forerunner and the anointed Davidic heir.**

The Lord, the God of Israel, is blessed for how he works through these two major agents. Where Mary's hymn was cosmic and personal, Zechariah's is cosmic and universal. Zechariah rejoices that God has raised up the Davidic horn to do his work of deliverance, as well as sending a prophet to prepare the way for him. That deliverance possesses both political and spiritual dimensions, as verses 71-75 and 78-79 show.

Luke describes the hymn as Spirit-inspired. In other Lukan accounts, often the Spirit's presence leads to a prophetic declaration or to praise (Acts 2:17-18; 11:27; 13:1; 19:6; 21:9). This hymn offers a divine commentary on God's plan. John is the prophet of the Most High pointing to Jesus, the bright Morning Star. So Zechariah highlights Jesus just as his son John will. Praise for Messianic Redemption (1:68-75)

John's birth means that God is once again working actively to redeem his promise (vv. 72-73). Zechariah praises God, for he has come and has redeemed his people. What the NIV refers to as God's coming heralds an important Lukan concept, God's visitation (1:78; 7:16; 19:44; Acts 15:14). This introduction

makes the hymn a praise psalm. The theme of the praise occurs in verses 68-70, while the explanation of the theme involves the rest of the hymn. God's visitation comes in Messiah's visitation (Lk 2:26-32). God has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. God often acted in history to "raise up" a prophet (Deut 18:15, 18), a judge (Judg 3:9, 15), a priest (1 Sam 2:35) or a king (2 Sam 3:10). Luke likes the idea as well (Acts 3:22, 26; 13:22), showing how God directs the events of his plan.

This Messiah is a picture of strength, which is why Zechariah mentions the horn. The horns of an ox are used for protection and for defeating opponents (Deut 33:17). The same image is used for a warrior (2 Sam 22:3; Ps 75:4-5, 10; 148:14) or a king who saves (1 Sam 2:10; Ps 132:17). Luke's starting point for thinking about Jesus is that he is a king.

God is doing what he promised. His word will come to pass. These events are as he said through his holy prophets of long ago. The promise involves rescue: God will save his people from their enemies and from all who hate them. Such salvation reflects the mercy of God and the recollection of the covenant made with Abraham. In this way the hymn actually combines two sets of divine promises--those about David's son and those made to Abraham. What God will do for his people he does through Messiah. The fresh fulfillment of both covenants begins with Jesus' arrival.

But what is the goal of this salvation? Here is perhaps the most insightful part of the hymn. Zechariah is not retreating from life or looking only to a future reward in heaven. His heart's desire is to serve [God] without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. This is the expression of an exemplary soul. The meaning of life comes in faithful service to a holy God. By saying our days, Zechariah represents many who share this desire. Salvation enables the child of God to serve God.

Who are the enemies referred to in the hymn? In the context it seems clear that Zechariah anticipates freedom from the opposition of enemies (v. 74). Possibly he hopes for rescue from Rome, much as John the Baptist seemed to anticipate when he asked Jesus whether he really was "the one who was to come" (7:18-23). Such a political deliverance for the people of God is also anticipated by John in Revelation 19.

But this is only a partial answer. Zechariah's hymn is an introduction to Luke's entire book. To ask what the hymn means for Luke, we need only to see how he develops the theme of enemies within his Gospel. Such an examination shows that the enemy consists of supernatural opposition (11:14-23). Jesus is the "someone stronger" who overruns the strong man Beelzebub. To provide real victory Jesus will need to vanquish not only human opponents but the spiritual ones that stand behind them as well (Eph 6:10-18). Jesus' activity shows his goal to be the reversal of the effect of demonic presence (Lk 13:10-17). As the Davidic Son, he heals and shows his authority (18:35-42). The power of his horn extends even into these dimensions of reality. The miracles are not only events of deliverance but pictures of a deeper reality. To know Jesus is to have access to authority that can overcome the presence of evil. We are able, as a result, to serve God in holiness and righteousness.

Two agents are responsible for this work. John the Baptist, as prophet, will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him. In the context of the hymn, it is best to see the Lord as a reference to God the Father, since he is the source of all the activity the hymn describes (as also in 1:17). Luke 1:76-77 speaks of his way and his people, a reference that looks back to 1:68, where the people are God's. For Luke, God is the producer-planner and Jesus is the plan's directing agent. John's preparation involves giving knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

Forgiveness is also a principal component of the expression of God's tender mercy. He is the one who makes the dayspring dawn upon us from on high, or in the NIV rendition, the rising sun . . . come to us from heaven. This is a reference to the sun's dawning in the morning. The Davidic horn (v. 69) is an image of light (Num 24:17; Is 11:1-10). The image of light will be important in Acts (13:47; 26:17-20) as well as in Luke (2:32). The picture is of a world cloaked in darkness and death, desperate for someone to lead it into light and life. For Zechariah, this rescue is Messiah's mission. The Christ is the bearer of forgiveness as his day dawns. Once his day dawns, the light of the "Sun" never sets. He is the one who guides our feet into the path of peace. Even the righteous Zechariah recognizes the need to be totally dependent on the one God will send. Those who are righteous know that the only true journey in life is the

one taken in the hands of God. In Luke 1, Zechariah has grown from a figure of doubt to an example of dependence.

For this reason Luke notes John's growth briefly and ends the chapter by placing John in the desert, where he will minister to the nation. Then Luke turns the story's spotlight from John and his birth and shines it on the star of his narrative, Jesus, the Davidic horn and king who delivers his people into the light.

**So John and Jesus come by God's mercy to prepare and lead God's people.  
John will proclaim salvation, but Jesus will take them to it.**

### **Application**

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
- What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
- What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
- Now talk to Jesus...

Adopted from <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Luke/Zechariahs-Hymn-Benedictus>

**For houseChurch material:**

**1. Have different readers read the Bible passage from 2 or more different translations. Better yet, assign participants to do the reading of each character in a dramatic and narrative fashion.**

**2. Reflect & meditate between each reading**

**3. Scripture**

Luke 1:5-25

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Luke 1:57-80

The Birth of John the Baptist

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

## Zechariah's Song

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

69 He has raised up a horn[a] of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David

70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

71 salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—

72 to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,

73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear

75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

76 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,

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

78 because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

79 to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace."

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

## 4. Application

1. What did you hear during the reading? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?

2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said?  
How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged from the reading?

3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

4. Share any of the above discoveries with your houseChurch. Ask each other, "What is your nugget?"

## 5. Discussion Questions

- Luke 1:8-10 & Revelation 8:1-5. Share your feelings about this statement: "Prayers are like the smoke that goes up to the throne of God through the burning of incense, a pleasing aroma to God."?

## Revelation 8:1-5

1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

3 Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. 4

The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

- Observe Luke 1:5-7. What do you think Zechariah and Elizabeth were feeling about their prayers? Can you relate to this?
- Zechariah had been chosen by lot from the hundreds of available priests, to offer incense for the Jewish nation. His childlessness, the great grief of his life, would have been on his mind as he prayed. The revelation that he would be the father of a special child was such an answer to prayer as to strike him speechless. As you contemplate this scene, are you ever awed by the great things God has done for you during your life?
- Here we have a story of a barren woman who was to have a son. Her son would prepare the way for the Messiah. That Messiah came. He lived, He died and He rose again from the dead. He then ascended to the right hand of the Father, where today He intercedes for all those who have faith in Him. There He prepares a place for all those who believe in Him. And when He comes, He will come to fetch those who are waiting for Him.
- 

**Now talk to Jesus...**