

# After Darkness Light

*the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light,  
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.  
(Matthew 4:16 ESV)*

*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare  
his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the  
tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in  
darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”  
(Luke 1:76–79 ESV)*

## **My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation**

**December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Luke 1:67-79**

**Luke 2:25-35**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning and Merry Christmas! It is good to be in the house of the Lord – amen? Amen. Today we celebrate the babe in the manger. Today we celebrate the beginning of the very good news and we have spent the last 3 weeks talking about the backstory to the greatest story ever told. We spent some time in the dark in order to better appreciate and more intelligently celebrate the light that comes at Christmas.

And hopefully, by God’s grace that is what we will do this morning. This morning I want to look at two passages that function as inspired SPOTLIGHTS focused on the child born of a Virgin in the city of David who is Christ the Lord. The first of those spotlights is found in Luke 1:67-79. This is a prophetic Psalm spoken by Zechariah – the father of John the Baptist – in contemplation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall describes it as:

“a psalm of praise giving an inspired commentary on the significance of the events which have begun to take place.”<sup>1</sup>

That sounds super useful doesn’t it? We need some inspired commentary because Christmas so often drifts towards meaningless sentiment. We want to do MORE than warm ourselves around

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<sup>1</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel Of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), 90.

the magic of Christmas – we want to know what it MEANS. We want to worship with understanding and so let me read to you from Luke 1:67-79; that's on page 856 in your pew Bibles. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

And 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 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:67–79 ESV)

Now before we thank God for the reading of his Word I want to read a little bit more. I mentioned that there are TWO of these spotlights – two of these inspired commentaries upon the meaning of Messiah's birth. The one we just read was given while Jesus was still in Mary's womb, this one is given while Jesus is still in Mary's arms – this one is given by Simeon when Jesus is presented as a newborn in the temple. Together these two spotlights serve to focus our attention on the meaning of the babe who was born in Bethlehem. Hear now this reading of God's Word from Luke 2:25-35 that's on page 857 in your pew Bibles.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:25–35 ESV)

This also is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Well, I told you at the start of this series that we read the Bible, in general, to learn about God and to learn about ourselves in order to understand why it is that Jesus is the Saviour that we need. The first 3 weeks of this series were heavy on the first two things – we learned a lot about God and a lot about human nature so that this morning we would be well positioned to answer the

question:

## Why Is Jesus The Saviour That We Need?

We'll draw equally upon the insights of the two passages we have just read together. The first we see is that Jesus is the Saviour that we need because:

### 1. He defeats our enemies

Zechariah mentions that in Luke 1:69-71; he says that God:

has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us (Luke 1:69–71 ESV)

The Bible teaches us very early on that we do not live in a neutral world. We live in a world with an enemy. Way back in Genesis 3 our enemy enters the story and attempts to invert the entire created order. We were created to be under God and over everything else – but the devil wanted that job for himself so he spoke to the woman in the form of a created thing and through her got to Adam and convinced them both to reject God's authority in order to be gods unto themselves. That's the fall – and right after the fall God tells our enemy in our hearing that he may have won a battle but he will not win the war. God promises the devil that a child will come from God born of a woman and:

he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

God told the devil that his days were numbered. A child will come and he will crush him and destroy him; though not without cost to himself. And so from that moment in the Bible we have been waiting for a suffering Saviour to come and defeat our enemy.

So, how does Jesus do that? Zechariah tells us that he will but he doesn't tell us how. You have to keep reading to get that. I'll give you the Cole's Notes. This aspect of our salvation is summarized brilliantly in Hebrews 2. The Apostle says:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that **through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil**, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14–15 ESV)

Did you hear that? Through death Jesus destroyed the one who has the power of death, that is the devil – that’s pretty clear isn’t it? What the Bible is saying is that DEATH itself was the sword in the devil’s hand. The devil has to play by the rules too and God had said that in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die – the devil wields the word of God like the sword that it is. God said, rebellion would result in death. That was the devil’s power. That was the weapon that he wielded against us. So how did Jesus break that weapon from the devil’s hand? Hebrews 2 tells us – by dying for us. Jesus gave for us the death we owe to God. And now the devil has nothing on us. If we are in Christ then he has nothing to say to God. What he can say? These rebels deserve to die? We did die – in the person of Jesus Christ. WE DIED. That’s why the Bible says:

if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. (Romans 6:8 ESV)

If you are united with Christ through faith then his death pays your debt and the devil has NOTHING ON YOU! He can only threaten, lie and bluster. There is no sword in his hand.

Paul says:

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:15 ESV)

That’s what God has done in Christ to secure your redemption! He has knocked the sword out of the devil’s hand. As long as you are covered in sin then the devil has every right to condemn you! But if you are in Christ, covered by his blood, then you are free. Your sins have been thrown into the sea. The field is clear and the way is open for you to go home to God.

The second thing that Zechariah says about Jesus is connected to that. He says that Jesus will restore our ministry.

## **2. He restores our ministry**

Look at verse 74-75:

that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Luke 1:74–75 ESV)

Do you know why you were saved, Christian? It isn't ultimately just so that you don't go to hell, you are saved so that you can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness all your days. All yours days here and all your days THERE – you are saved to SERVE!

The Apostle John says something very similar in the Book of Revelation. Just before the 7 letters to the churches he offers a word of praise, he says:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:5–6 NIV11)

That's pretty much exactly what Zechariah says isn't it? We are set free by the blood – by the death – of Jesus so that we can be a kingdom and priests to serve God the Father FOREVER. Listen to me, my friends, salvation is about MORE THAN the forgiveness of sins – not less than, but more than. What Zechariah is saying, what John is saying is that we are saved FROM SIN FOR SERVICE. That's the whole picture, that's the end game, that's what it means FINALLY to be saved!

It means to be again, who we were created to be.

Now of course we are ready to see that in this story, because we read that story. (Pointing to chart) Remember this? Do you remember we talked briefly about this peak and we referred to it as the era of David and Solomon. David defeated our enemies and Solomon built the house of the Lord. It was a partnership – David knew that, he said to Solomon:

“My son, I had it in my heart to build a house to the name of the LORD my God. 8 But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. 9 Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. 10 He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.’ (1 Chronicles 22:7–10 ESV)

Do you see that? David's job was to wage great wars and defeat all our enemies. Solomon's job was to build the house of the Lord. No one person in the Old Testament perfectly anticipates

Christ! He is more than all of them. He is the prophet like Moses, he is the Warrior like David and he builds the house like King Solomon. He is all of our salvation. And Zechariah sees that. He sees that the child born to Mary will defeat our enemy – he will break the sword from the devil’s hand and he will make us again the people we were created to be. We are saved to serve.

Now, once again Zechariah doesn’t tell us how Jesus will do this – he just tells us that he will – you have to keep the reading the NT to get all that, but again let me give you the Cole’s Notes. There is a passage in 1 Peter that is very helpful. Peter says:

you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5 ESV)

So it’s a process. You yourselves ARE BEING BUILT UP. We’ve talked about this many times, there is a sense in which salvation is instantaneous. The moment you repent of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ – you are SAVED! Once and forever – AMEN? Amen. And yet there is ALSO a sense in which we are on an upward journey of change and transformation. The Bible talks about that too:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

So Jesus came to the earth and defeated our enemy – he lived the life and he died the death that we owe to God - that’s a one time thing but now there is this process bit. This process of change and becoming by one degree of glory to the next – how does Jesus do that? Through the gift of the Holy Spirit. He puts his Spirit in us to transform our character. As we see God and hear God’s Word the Spirit in us grabs hold of things and uses them like tools and chisels to shape and fashion us into the image and likeness of Christ. And he gives us gifts so that we can serve God and others as we were created to do. Paul talks about that, he says:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7 ESV)

Every person has at least one spiritual gift. Every saved person is helped by the Holy Spirit to do something necessary and wonderful in the house of the Lord. You were not saved to sit you were saved to serve. God is preparing an eternal priesthood. He is building a band and he is teaching us how to sing. That’s where we are in the story, if we are in Christ. We are saved and we are being

saved. We are being changed into the people we were created to be and the people that we will be for all eternity.

### 3. He teaches us truth

Our third inspired insight comes from the prophecy of Simeon when baby Jesus is presented in the temple. Simeon says in Luke 2:29-32:

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 **a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.**” (Luke 2:29–32 ESV)

Those are two different ways of saying that God is speaking through the person of Jesus Christ. We get this same doctrine in more straight forward terms in Hebrews 1:1-2. The Apostle says there:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days **he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of **the glory of God** and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:1–3 ESV)

Hebrews 1 says that in days past – in the Old Testament era – God spoke to his people through prophets like Moses – do you remember Moses would go into the Tent of Meeting and the glory of God would descend on that tent like a cloud? Well now the glory of God rests upon and radiates from the person of Jesus Christ! He is where you go now to hear from God! His word is God’s Word, his life is God’s revelation and salvation, that’s what these passages are saying. Everything about Jesus IS the Word of God. That’s why John’s birth narrative cuts right to the chase – he skips the manger and the shepherds and the angels and he just says:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 ESV)

Jesus is the Saviour that we need because he defeats our enemy, he restores our ministry and he reveals to us the truth about God.

The fourth insight also comes from Simeon’s prophesy, look at verses 33-35:

#### 4. He raises us up to God

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:33–35 ESV)

I spoke about the fall a few minutes ago. The fall in Genesis 3 is a story about how in reaching up we fell down. The devil’s goal was to reverse the created order so that he would be on top and we would be on the bottom. But as I mentioned God said that his plan would ultimately be defeated. In the end because of Jesus everything will be exactly as God intended it to be. We will be as and where we were intended to be. In the end because of Jesus we will be under God and OVER everything else. Jesus is appointed for the fall and rising of many. Now, what that clearly implies is that Jesus does not make EVERYONE rise; the text says that Jesus will cause MANY to rise and MANY to fall – what does that mean?

Scholars debate the precise meaning of this saying. Some say that both movements apply to the same people, meaning that Jesus makes some fall to their knees so that he can raise them up to the position they were created for. Other says that the two movements apply to two different sets up people – they people that Jesus raises up and the people – because of their unbelief – whom Jesus casts down. It could be that the saying is meant to be heard both ways. The Bible does say that we have to fall before Jesus to be raised to our former position; Jesus says that in Matthew 23:

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:12 ESV)

So that could be it. But it is also true that Jesus is the one ultimately who decides whether people go to heaven or hell. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats makes that very point. At the end of the parable Jesus says to those on his right:

‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (Matthew 25:34 ESV)

And he says about those on his left:

these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46 ESV)



As Jesus said to Martha:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live (John 11:25 ESV)

Jesus is the one appointed for the rising and the falling of many. Jesus is the one who brings us home to God.

That’s what Simeon saw, that’s what Zechariah saw. These men filled with the Holy Spirit help us to understand the world shaping, life changing significance of the child who was born to Mary in the City of David who is Christ the Lord.

Now, I mentioned that our goal in this series was to worship with understanding on Christmas – we want to do more than “feel the magic” we want to understand the meaning so that we can respond to Jesus as we should. So we are going to do something a little bit unusual – we are going to invite Pastor Jody and his team up to lead us in a song that you’ve probably sung a 100 times before, but now we are going to sing it with understanding. This whole series has been about FUELING your Christmas worship – so don’t let me down – sing like you understand what God has done in Christ for your salvation. But don’t put on your coat, don’t start ruffling your papers because we’re actually going to come back for just a moment or two of closing application. But for now let me turn it over to Pastor Jody, will you come and lead us?

(After “Joy To The World”)

## **How Should We Respond?**

Just before we leave I want to help you understand the connection between Christmas and the Great Commission. Zechariah would not have used those terms but he understood the concept. Look at back at his prophesy and specifically to verse 76. His prophetic Psalm has as its focus the significance of Jesus Christ, but it has as its occasion the birth of John the Baptist. John, Zechariah is told, has a very particular mission as a result of what Jesus came to do. So in verse 76 Zechariah turns and addresses his son. He says:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins (Luke 1:76–77 ESV)

Your job John is to make sure that people see Jesus! Make sure that people see the salvation that has come from God. Point to Jesus John. Make sure people see what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation.

In a very real sense, our job is no different than John's. John went before Jesus and we come after but other than that, it is pretty much the same. Peter told his people their job now was to:

proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 ESV)

That's what this is all about - the story that begins at Christmas necessarily ends with the great commission. Silent Night – if you understand it – has to lead to Go Tell It On The Mountain. Magic – if its real – has to lead to mission. So you have a job now church, and it is simply this: to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

If you know then you go because this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God, let's pray together.