

## The Canticles of Christmas: Benedictus

The song of Zechariah in Luke 1:68-79 is commonly called the Benedictus, because that is the first word in the Latin translation of the song. It is a remarkable song, because Zechariah has just regained his voice after nine months of being unable to speak because of his lack of belief in the word of the Lord from Gabriel the angel (see Luke 1:5-23). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah now bursts forth with praise on the occasion of the circumcision of his infant son, John.

### Luke 1:67-80

67 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.”

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

We notice in this song, as with the Magnificat, the believer sings, because of the joy he/she has in his/heart for the redemption brought by Jesus Christ. In this song there are two stanzas. In verses 68-75, Zechariah rejoices in the Lord because of what He has done. In verses 76-79, Zechariah speaks to his son about his purpose in life.

#### I. We sing to the Lord of our salvation (vv. 68-75)

a. We bless the Lord for what He has done (v. 68).

Notice that Zechariah says God has *visited* His people. Look at Genesis 21:1; 1 Samuel 2:21; Ruth 1:6; and Exodus 4:31 to gain an understanding of what it means for God to “visit” His people. In Psalm 130:7-8 and Isaiah 43:1, we see what it means for God to “redeem” His people; that is, He purchases us for Himself. We learn in the New Testament that God has redeemed/purchased us with the priceless payment of His Son’s own blood. What a glorious thing He has done!

b. We bless the Lord for how He has redeemed us (vv. 69-71)

Zechariah explains that God has redeemed us through raising up a “horn of salvation” in the house of David. He is rejoicing in the child in Mary’s womb rather than Elizabeth’s womb! He recognizes that salvation is coming through Messiah, Jesus, and takes great joy in God’s

means of our salvation. This great salvation is foretold through the prophets. One must notice that Zechariah's song is suffused with Old Testament references in every verse. He was a student of the Bible and obviously contemplated it deeply.

c. We bless the Lord for why He has redeemed us (vv. 74-75).

He has redeemed us for two reasons. First of all, to maintain His faithfulness to His merciful promises (vv. 72-73a) and also, secondly, that we might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness all our days (vv. 74-75). We have been given the inspired revelation of God, a new innocent record before the Deity, new hearts, and multiple spiritual gifts in order that we might serve the Lord and serve our neighbor.

## II. **We remind those under our care of their obligations before the Lord (vv. 76-80)**

a. We remind others of who they are (v. 76a).

Zechariah explained to his son that he would be a "prophet of the most high." We are told in Acts 2 that we, as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, will become the prophets of the Lord. In fact, the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit's prophecy. We are the ones who are called to proclaim the greatness of Christ here and around the world.

b. We are told what we are to do as prophets (vv. 76b-77)

We are to point consistently to the Lord Jesus Christ, that others may be forgiven of their sins. John consistently did this, and so are we to do.

c. We remind others of why they point to the Lord (vv. 78-80)

We point to the Lord because He is the light of God that shines upon our path that we may walk "the way of peace." There is no other way to live a life of true peace but by following the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What was the historical occasion for Zechariah's song? What is the main theme of his song?
  
2. Luke tells us in verse 67 that Zechariah "was filled with the Holy Spirit." What are the primary evidences in this song of Zechariah's in-filling of the Spirit?
  
3. Where in the song is the Old Testament reflected? Why is this significant?
  
4. In verses 72-75 Zechariah explains why God delivers His people through raising up a son of David. What are God's reasons? What do those reasons mean to you?
  
5. What did Zechariah say was the purpose of John's life? What does this say about the purpose of your life?

### Going Deeper

1. What songs, what music, do you enjoy? Why? What songs do you hum, whistle, or sing? Why?
2. Do you feel that you have a grasp on the biblical history of redemption as Zechariah did? Would this be a good time to plan your Bible reading for next year?