

# 'tis the Season

AN ADVENT SERIES

V GROUP  
STUDY



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'tis the Season: vGroup Study

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# LUKE 1:57–80

Most all of us love music. And when it comes to music, there is something for everyone— young and old, across every demographic. From heavy metal rock to southern gospel, from Elvis to Taylor Swift, we each love to have our favorite songs played on repeat with the volume knob turned ‘up to eleven’.

But no matter your genre preference, one of the reasons we all seem to be drawn to music is the story component of songs. Everyone loves a good story, and often times the best songs tell the best stories. A song can tell a love story. It can use music to narrate our victories and our losses. A song can tell a coming-of-age story or sing about the struggles of this world. Songs are often just stories expressed in the form of music.

- Name 1–2 of your favorite songs. Does this song tell a story? If so, what is that story? Or maybe, what is the story behind why the artist wrote this particular song?
- Why do you think that we as humans are drawn to a good story? For you, what components make up a good story?
- What do stories and songs have in common? Do the elements that make a good song also make a good story or vice versa?

If we have been following the Christmas story in the gospel of Luke, we will note that we have been reading two parallel birth narratives. Luke first introduces us to an elderly couple from the Judean hill country who have been unable to bear children. The angel Gabriel appears to the husband Zechariah and prophesies that his wife Elizabeth will soon bear a son. This son will be named John. He will be the forerunner of the coming, long-awaited Jewish Messianic king (v. 5–25).

Several months later, approximately 100 miles north of Jerusalem in the small town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee, Luke tells of a young virgin who received a similar angelic appearance. The young woman named Mary, betrothed to a man named Joseph, was told by the angel Gabriel that she would also soon miraculously bear a son. This son will be named Jesus. And as his name suggests, he will bring salvation and healing to the nations—starting with Israel.

In this week’s passage (Luke 1:57–80), we continue to track along with these birth narratives. In addition to reading about the birth of John the Baptist, we are going to explore the words of a prophetic song sung by John’s father, Zechariah, which tells the grand story of God’s redemptive work throughout the whole of human history.

*<sup>57</sup>Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup>And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. <sup>59</sup>And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, <sup>60</sup>but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." <sup>61</sup>And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." <sup>62</sup>And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. <sup>63</sup>And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. <sup>64</sup>And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. <sup>65</sup>And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, <sup>66</sup>and 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.*

Luke 1:57-66

In these verses, we find the fulfillment of the words the angel Gabriel spoke to Zechariah while he was 'serving as priest before God' in the temple in Jerusalem some nine months earlier (see verses 5-25).

- How are the words spoken by the angel Gabriel in v. 5-25 fulfilled in these verses here?
- What does Zechariah and Elizabeth's story teach us about God's character?
- What lessons are present in the example of Zechariah and Elizabeth in this story?

*<sup>67</sup>And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,*

*<sup>68</sup>"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
<sup>69</sup>and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
<sup>70</sup>as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
<sup>71</sup>that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
<sup>72</sup>to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
<sup>73</sup>the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
<sup>74</sup>that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
<sup>75</sup>in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

*<sup>76</sup>And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
<sup>77</sup>to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
<sup>78</sup>because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high  
<sup>79</sup>to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

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

Luke 1:67–80

Zechariah, having been rendered mute for the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy, now has his tongue loosed. And being filled with the Holy Spirit, he sings a prophetic song that is packed full of Old Testament references and allusions to major Old Testament story lines. His song connects God's story and past dealings with Israel to what He is about to do in the very near future for this nation through the birth of Jesus.

- How is Zechariah's song structured? The number of stanzas?
- In general, what does the first stanza discuss? (v. 67–75)
- In general, what does the second stanza discuss? (v. 76–79)

Look at verse 68. The opening line of Zechariah's song seems to be a generalized reference to the Exodus story (Exodus 1–15). This story, presented toward the beginning of the Old Testament, serves as the archetype story for how an Israelite would have understood the Lord's coming on behalf of his people.

- If verse 68 is an allusion to the Exodus story (Exodus 1–15), what does it mean for the Lord to 'come and redeem his people' as king like he did in the Exodus story? (Hint: see v. 71)

- God's 'coming' provided what for the Israelites in the Exodus story? For the Egyptians?

- Compare the cultural context for the Israelites in the Exodus story to that of the Israelites of Zechariah's day.

Look at verses 69–71. After the Exodus narrative, the story of the Old Testament moves into what is known as the books of the Prophets. In the traditional Hebrew ordering of the Old Testament, the books of the Prophets include Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, the three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), and the twelve minor prophets. Collectively these books speak a unified message.

- In verse 69, the term 'horn' is a symbol. What is the meaning of this symbol?
- Based on the context of verses 68–71, what can we infer is the collective message of the prophets spoken in the Old Testament that Zechariah alludes to in verse 70?

Look at verses 72–74. By raising up a king from the line of David, Zechariah sees God's story of salvation at work in his present day.

- How is God's salvation seen as an act of his mercy?
- How is God's mercy connected to how he 'remembers'?
- What does it mean that God's salvation frees us to serve him 'without fear'?

- What does it mean that God's salvation frees us to serve him without fear 'in holiness'?
- What does it mean that God's salvation frees us to serve him without fear 'in righteousness'?
- What or who did Jesus ultimately come to defeat?

Look at verses 75–80. Zechariah now transitions to sing/speak about his son in the second stanza of the song. His son's ministry will be one of preparation.

- In verse 76, the title 'Most High' refers to whom? The title 'Lord' refers to whom?
- According to verse 77, how will John prepare the people for the coming of the Lord?
- Is this knowledge intellectual only or experiential/personal knowledge or both?
- According to verses 78–79, who is the receiver of John's message (and subsequently Jesus' salvation)?
- How does John's message work to 'guide' us into 'peace' with God?

With the births of Jesus and his forerunner, John the Baptist, comes all the hopes and dreams of a people. Every faithful Israelite, like Zechariah, knew God's story. They knew

how the Lord God had, in the past, brought his salvation. Each clung to the promises of his future coming. His coming would mean salvation for their people and freedom from their enemies. For centuries, they had waited anxiously for the birth of a king—a messiah from the line of David that would bring peace to their people that would flow out to the nations. And now, as Zechariah's song celebrates, the time had come; the king's arrival was drawing near!

- What are the major themes and truths of Zechariah's song?
- Can we see how, through Zechariah's song, God's story of salvation flows throughout the whole of Scripture? How does this help us see the continuity of the Old and New Testament meta-story?
- As we celebrate Jesus' first coming this Advent season, how does Zechariah's song prepare us for the time when Jesus will come again?
- The fulfillment of God's promises led to an outpouring of praise from Zechariah. What promises has God kept for us this Advent season that are deserving of our praise?
- How can we praise God for his faithfulness to his promises?