

A PRIEST AND HIS PRAYER  
Luke 1:5-25

Intro: There is no greater evidence of the sovereignty of God in the Bible than in the events surrounding the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came to the earth. I say this with respect to His birth, His death, and His resurrection. So many things had to take place as predicted at just the right time and in the right places that only a sovereign God could possibly have seen to it that everything was in order. Thus, the Christmas season is a time when we all should recognize the providence of God. He Who could order the events of history so as to fulfill all of the prophecies and promises connected with the coming of the Messiah and Saviour, has to be God!

One great act of divine sovereignty had to do with the birth of John the Baptist--a birth which was attended with more promises which were to be fulfilled in the course of his ministry.

Luke is the only one who gives us this account. It is one of the most amazing stories in Scripture, and yet not unlike that of the birth of Isaac, or of Samuel, or of Samson. These must have been stories with which Zacharias and Elisabeth were familiar. It shows that God is unchanging, and that what He has done in the past, He is still able to do.

One thing that all of these births had in common (i.e., Isaac's, Samuel's, Samson's, and John the Baptist's) was that they came when the light of the truth of God was burning very, very dimly. This was true of Elijah's day, the OT prophet whose name was linked with that of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was really the last of the prophets of the OT, and he was raised up in a time of declension, as prophets normally were. But, as was the case with the parents of Isaac, Samuel, and Samson, God was at work with the parents of John the Baptist before he was born.

So, let us look, first of all, at . . .

I. ZACHARIAS, THE PRIEST.

Some very significant things are said about, not only him, but also about his wife, Elisabeth, beginning with verse 6 of Luke 1.

A. They both were truly the children of God (Luke 1:6a).

This was quite unusual in the time that the Lord Jesus Christ was born. The scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, elders--in fact, the whole Sanhedrin--was for the most part made up of men who did not know the Lord!

But to the glory of God it can be said that the light of

salvation had not been extinguished even in this dark period of Israel's history. "They were both righteous before God." Nothing could be clearer than that they were saved.

- B. They both gave proof of their salvation by their walk. They lived the Word of God to the point that the Spirit of God could say that they were "blameless." Their lives were above reproach. They were recognized by the people of their generation as godly people.
- C. Still talking in the plural, Luke tells us that they had one great disappointment in their lives: "They had no child." Elisabeth was barren, and, although they had prayed about this, now they were both too old to have a child.
- D. The fourth thing that we are told about them is that they were faithful. Zacharias in the account given to us by Luke was, in spite of his disappointment, continuing on with his priestly work--evidently charged during that particular week with doing that which spoke in a special way of Christ: the offering up of the morning and evening sacrifice.

All of these things have to be said to the glory of God, not to the glory of Zacharias and Elisabeth. Cf. Phil. 2:12, 13. This is always the case when you have people who know the Lord, and are living according to His Word. It cannot be any other way except by the sovereign power of God.

But now let us look at . . .

## II. ZACHARIAS' PRAYER.

Undoubtedly Elisabeth had prayed also, but the angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias as he was going about his priestly duties, and call the prayer for a son, his prayer. See Luke 1:13a.

It is referred to in the singular, not because he had only prayed once, but because his many prayers had had one burden. He and Elisabeth wanted a son--at least a child--but the evidence would seem to point to the fact that they wanted a son.

But I want to suggest something else. This is not quite clear in the record of Scripture, but it would seem safe to assume that they were no longer praying about this. However, we also know that our prayers remain before God, and that, when we pray according to the will of God, the answer is assured, even though we may not be aware of it. Cf. Dan.

10:12. See also 1 John 5:14, 15.

Why does God wait? Not to destroy our faith, but to strengthen it. And it was seen that Zacharias and Elisabeth continued to walk with the Lord even though the life-long desire of their hearts had never been satisfied. They may have taken it as a denial, but God had moved upon their hearts to pray such a prayer because it was to be the first in a series of events leading up to the birth of the Messiah!

### III. THE ANSWER TO THEIR PRAYER (Luke 1:8 ff.).

The answer was given in three phases:

- 1) When the angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias.
- 2) When Elisabeth conceived.
- 3) When their son, John, was finally born. (For this latter part, see Luke 1:57-80.)

We have the first two in our text.

#### A. The appearance of the angel of the Lord (Luke 1:8-12).

In all of Zacharias' years as a priest, he had never had an experience like this. What an illustration of Jer. 33:3 and Eph. 3:20!

#### B. The message of the angel of the Lord (Luke 1:13-17).

Three things are mentioned.

1. What he would mean to his parents (vv. 13, 14a).
2. What he would mean to the Lord (v. 15).
3. What he would mean to his generation (vv. 14b, 16, 17).

#### C. The unbelief of Zacharias (Luke 1:18-22).

The people perceived that he had seen a vision, but they did not know that it was because he had not received the message of the angel.

#### D. The confirmation of the angel's message (Luke 1:23-25).

Concl: The Apostle Paul was to write later the words of 2 Tim. 2:13. What greater evidence could we have of the faithfulness of God than for Him to work in the hearts of two of the most godly people of that day, two who had been "blameless" in their lives, and for Zacharias especially to fail in what was the most important event of his life, the birth of his son, given in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and Malachi's prophecy!

Had everything rested upon Zacharias' faith, all would have been ruined at the very moment the Lord was preparing to send His Son in a similar manner. But all was not lost. God's purposes cannot be ruined even by the unbelief of the most godly. He is faithful, and His Word is sure!

If you want to see the outcome as far as Zacharias was concerned, read the last part of the chapter--vv. 57-80, and you will find that the Lord worked in his heart during those 9 months so that he was stronger than ever, his understanding was clearer, and he most of all was ready to give all of the glory to God.

May this part of the Christmas story encourage us to look, not at the human instruments which God used then, nor at the people He may see fit to use now. But let us read our Bibles carefully and realize that the glory always belongs to God!

GABRIEL'S SECOND MISSION  
Luke 1:26-38

Intro: Gabriel is only mentioned 4 times in the Bible: twice in Daniel (8:16; 9:21), and twice in Luke (1:19, 26).  
- But it is possible that he is the one referred to as "an angel of the Lord" in Matt. 1:20; 2:13, 19.

He is always concerned with the Word of God--its revelation, and its illumination. Such is certainly the case in the passage before us just now. It was Gabriel who was chosen of God to bear the message to Mary that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. It would not be possible to emphasize the importance of what was going on in those days unless God Himself had seen fit to appear.

We know that angels were also prominent in the giving of the Law, and it is very likely that Gabriel may have been very important at that time also. Cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19.

Also, if angels are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14), then it is not surprising to find that Gabriel would be sent to convey the message to Zacharias and to Mary, and possibly even to Joseph.

The way all things began to fit together gave unmistakable evidence that God was at work!

- In our text we have three important parts:

- 1) A divine mission (vv. 26-30).
- 2) A divine message (vv. 31-33).
- 3) A divine miracle (vv. 34-38).

Let us consider each section in order.

I. A DIVINE MISSION (Luke 1:26-30).

It was not divine because the angel was Deity, but because God sent the angel. Gabriel was "sent from God":

- 1) To the land of Israel.
- 2) To a particular part of that land: Galilee.
- 3) To one certain city: Nazareth.
- 4) To just one woman, a virgin, by the name of Mary.

Before he delivered his message, he made it clear that he had come specifically to her!

- Luke says that she was "troubled." Luke used a word here which appears nowhere else in the NT. It indicates that Mary was usually a quiet, composed, peaceful person, but that this really upset her. She was greatly disturbed by the angel's appearance, and was very fearful as to what it all meant. This had to be the reason that Gabriel said, "Fear not."

In addition, she "cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be." Her mind was in a turmoil as she tried to come up with as many reasons as she could as to why the angel would appear to her. Obviously she was not expecting anything like this! She was as surprised as anyone could possibly have been.

But then followed . . .

## II. A DIVINE MESSAGE (Luke 1:31-33).

He was called "great"--the same word that Gabriel had used of John in Luke 1:15. It means important. Both men were to have a key place in the plan and purpose of God.

But who was the greatest?

Let John the Baptist answer. Cf. John 1:15; 3:25-31.

See also the testimony of the Apostle John in John 1:6-9.

So, even in the earliest period of the Gospel record it is very clear that, although John was 6 months older and was "great," yet Jesus is the greater of the two!

How did Gabriel portray His greatness?

Five ways:

- A. Jesus was greater in His Person: "the Son of the Highest" (v. 32).

In v. 35 Gabriel called Him "the Son of God."

John was the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth; Jesus was the only One ever born with just a mother--not a human father.

- B. Jesus was greater in His place in the Old Testament.

He was the long-awaited son of David, the Messiah, the promised King. See v. 32: ". . . and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David."

Isaiah predicted the coming of John, and so did Malachi. But the OT is full of prophecies of Jesus. And even in many places Jesus appeared in OT times. So, again, Jesus is greater.

Note the comparisons in Hebrews--with angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron.

C. Jesus was greater in His purpose in coming.

John had come to announce the coming of Jesus Christ, but God sent His Son as JESUS--the saving One, the Redeemer. John needed salvation, but Jesus Christ did not! So, again we see that Jesus Christ was greater.

Note "Jesus" in v. 31.

D. Jesus was greater in His power (v. 33).

"And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Truly John was great. Notice our Lord's words in Luke 7:28,

For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

E. Jesus was greater in the permanence of His place.

Before John died he had lost his place. The position of the Lord Jesus Christ will get greater and greater, and He will never lose His place. See v. 33.

So this divine message had to do with the greatest of all sons.

III. A DIVINE MIRACLE (Luke 1:34-38).

It is amazing to see how differently the Lord dealt with Mary as compared with Zacharias. Both had questions. Both were answered, but Zacharias was struck dumb for 9 months. Perhaps the answer is to be found in the difference in their positions (Zacharias, a priest), and in their knowledge of the truth.

Note: The births of both John the Baptist and of our Lord Jesus Christ were miraculous. God had to intervene in both instances. But in our Lord's case, the miracle had never been performed before!

Mary's question is in v. 34; the answer, in v. 35.

And, although there was no precedent for this in history (other than the prophecy which Mary may have known), she believed Gabriel's message and accepted the will of God. See v. 38.

Concl: Probably no one here has heard tonight anything about the

birth of Christ which he (or she) did not know before! But perhaps you have not at least notice what great tenets of the faith are taught by Luke in this passage--truths which a person must accept in order to rightfully claim to be a Christian.

— Let me point out what these are.

- 1) The mere humanity of Mary. She was not Deity. She, too, was a sinner in need of a Saviour. Notice her words in Luke 1: 46, 47. Thus, she was not immaculately conceived. She gave birth to the Son of God, but she was not God herself.

Proof is found in two statement which Gabriel made to her:

- 1) In v. 28: ". . . thou art highly favored . . ."
- 2) In v. 30: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God."

Both are expressions which show that Mary did not deserve the honor which God was giving her, but that it was given to her by grace!

There are not four persons in the Godhead; only three!

- 2) The divine inspiration of the Old Testament.

— There can only be one other fulfillment of prophecy that can be compared in importance to the prophecies of Christ's first coming, and those are the prophecies which have to do with His second coming. But Christ is the greatest proof that we have that the Old Testament is from God.

This is what Gabriel was talking about in vv. 32, 33.

A person may not understand the OT as he should, but no Christian can possibly deny that it is the Word of God.

- 3) The virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ were not virgin-born, conceived by the Holy Spirit, then He is only a man and in need of a Saviour Himself. A true Christian cannot deny the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this way His Deity was preserved when He became a man.

- 4) The humanity and Deity of Mary's Son: ". . . therefore that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called holy, Son of God." Or better, that which is to be born of thee shall be called holy, Son of God.

— Add to all of these, the evidence of the sovereignty of God in choosing Mary.

His Name, JESUS  
Matt. 1:18-25

Intro: Matthew's account tells us how Joseph learned about the birth of the son of Mary. When he wrote that "she was found with child," it seems to indicate that Mary had not told him. He could only come to one conclusion: that Mary had been unfaithful to him, and that she was going to have an illegitimate child.

He could have subjected her to public disgrace. The Law prescribed stoning in such case. But, and evidently it was because of his great love for her, although he was "a just man, and not willing to make per a publick example, was minded to put her away privily." This meant that their engagement would be broken, and they would never be married.

However, at that time God intervened by sending "the angel of the Lord" to inform him that Mary had not been unfaithful, but that she was with child "of the Holy Ghost." (See v. 20.)

It may be that the reason we have vv. 22, 23 here is because Joseph knew the truth contained in Isa. 7:14, and that it was through the Word that that he came to believe that God was fulfilling that promise through the child that Mary was going to have. And so Joseph took her as his wife, but live with her as a husband until after the baby Jesus was born.

The words which "the angel of the Lord" spoke to Joseph in that dream are now well-known, and they are the words that I want to think about with you in preparation for the Lord's Supper:

And she shall bring forth a son,  
and thou shall call his name JESUS:  
for he shall save his people from their sins.

Mary had been given the same message in Luke 1:31 which we considered last Sunday night:

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in the womb, and  
bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

First, let us think about . . .

I. THE NAME: JESUS.

A. It was a common name.

Paul had a fellowworker whose name was "Jesus, which is called Justus." Cf. Col. 4:11.

Luke mentioned in Luke 3:29 that our Lord had an ancestor according to the flesh whose name was Jo-se. The Greek us Jesus.

Most of us have known that Joshua in the Hebrew is the same as Jesus in the Greek. So one of the greatest of all OT saints carried the name of our Saviour.

It was a common name, and linked our Lord with the common people of his day.

B. It was a meaningful name.

The angel said, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for . . ."

But it means Jehovah is helper, or Help of Jehovah.

We have the thought in Psa. 121:1-8. It pictures man in great need, with help coming only from the Lord Jehovah.

But beyond all of this we have . . .

## II. THE REASON HE WAS NAMED, JESUS.

" . . . for he shall save his people from their sins."

There are four truths that I want you to see here, and I trust that they will be used of the Lord to prepare us for the Lord's Supper tonight.

A. The Greek word for "he," , is very emphatic. It could be translated, HE and no other!

The angel was ascribing the work of salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ alone! Salvation is not up to man with the Lord assisting him here and there. Nor is it a work of God with man completing what God has started. No! Salvation is of the Lord--from start to finish.

This word also eliminates the idea that there are many ways to God. There is only one way, and that is through JESUS! Cf. John 14:6; 1 John 5:12; Acts 4:12.

B. Secondly, notice the words, "shall save."

This is a promise. Coming from the angel who had been sent from God, the promise is certain. There is no doubt about it. It speaks of a final, certain salvation.

People may ask you, "Have you been saved?" And you can say, "Yes, I have been saved!" Or they can ask you, "Are you being saved?" And you can say, "Yes, I am being saved!" Or they can ask you, "Will you finally be saved?" And you can say, "Yes, I will finally be saved because the angel said, "He shall save his people from their sins."

C. "His people."

Here is our good friend, Particular Redemption.

"He shall save his people." Who are His people? His people are those whom the Father has given to Him. He prayed in John 17,

As thou hast given him power over all flesh,  
that he should give eternal life to as many as  
thou hast given him (v. 2).

In other words, the Lord did not come to save those who on their own would come to Him, but He came to "save his people from their sins."

D. "From their sins."

To bring out the meaning, let me contrast this with the statement which John made in Rev. 1:5. There the preposition is ek, out of, in the sense of delivering us from the power of, or the guilt of. But in Matt. 1:21 the preposition is apo--meaning, away from, separated from them so as to see them never again.

Cf. Psa. 103:10-12. Also Psa. 85:2.

Concl: This is the Christmas message. But this is also the message that we are remember when we come to the Lord's Table. Let us meditate on these truths as the men serve us tonight, praying that the Lord will make them even more precious to us than they have ever been before.

CAN THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH?  
Luke 2:1-20

Intro: Every year at Christmas we hear again those familiar words,

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:13, 14).

And every year we hear those words against a background in the world of wars, crime, hatred, selfishness, and a growing manifestation of sin! And yet we continue to repeat these words, and to hear them sung. Will there ever be peace on this earth, or just what do those words mean?

One thing that ought to be an encouragement to us as Christians is that these words continue to be used even though it seems as though every Christmas the world is farther from peace than ever before. That is surely the case this year!

Tonight I am going to limit myself to the first 20 verses of Luke 2 except for the time that it will take to recognize that the OT prophets spoke of a time when there would be peace throughout the world. One example of such a prophecy is Isaiah 2:1-5. (Read.) We surely have not seen a fulfillment of verse 4 as yet, but, because it is a part of the Word of God, we can be sure that that day will come!

But we need to think of peace in two different ways:

- 1) There will be this universal peace in God's own time.
- 2) But the Scriptures are full of promises in both the OT and the NT of personal peace even when there is anything but peace throughout the world.

E.g., cf. Isa. 26:3, 4. Also Phil. 4:6, 7.

It is this latter peace that we are concerned with in Luke 2, and it is this peace that we need to be concerned about at the present time.

What encouragement do we find in our text in Luke 2? What kind of peace were the angels proclaiming?

Note first . . .

I. THE HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES (Luke 2:1-7).

It had to do with the temporary move of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth in Galilee down to Bethlehem in Judaea some 80 to 100 miles away.

It came at a very difficult time for Mary, but the timing was perfect according to the plan of God. The Lord had to be

born in Bethlehem according to Micah 5:2. Otherwise the Word of God would have been broken.

But, in order for this to be done, God had to work in the hearts of ungodly men--two of whom are mentioned by Luke. One, Caesar Augustus, represented the height of human power and authority. The other, Cyrenius (also spelled, Quirinius), who is mentioned here to show the type of men who ruled under Augustus. Cyrenius was very ambitious, having come to his position without family assistance, and who was cruel, over-bearing, and licentious in his behavior with women. Obviously men in this category cared nothing for God nor were they mindful of the workings of the Lord. Nevertheless, God moved upon their hearts so that by royal decree Joseph and Mary were forced to go to Bethlehem just in time for the baby Jesus to be born!

If we were recognizing some of the wonders of God's working, this would have to be included! It is nothing short of amazing!

The second part of our text has to do with . . .

## II. THE ANGELIC MISSION (Luke 2:8-14).

This is the passage that many of us learned as children, and children all over the world repeat it every Christmas season.

Let us notice the details.

### A. To whom were the angels sent?

Not to Augustus. Not to Cyrenius. But to a group of unnamed shepherds!

Obviously the angels were not expected, nor had anything like this happened to the shepherds before. They were afraid.

But this is characteristic of the Lord's dealings with men. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31.

### B. Who sent the angels?

They were the ministers of God. This is the message that the Bible gives us concerning angels. Cf. Heb. 1:14.

The message did not originate with angels; it originated with God. God told them where to go, and God told them what to say to the shepherds.

### C. What was their message?

This is the important part of the text.

1. It was a message of "great joy."
2. It was for, lit., all THE people.
3. It had to do with the birth of Mary's baby, but they were told two very important things about Him:
  - a. He was coming as a Saviour.
  - b. He was not only Mary's child, but He was "Christ the Lord"!

After the angel of the Lord had told them all of this, a multitude of angels appeared, praising God, and saying (or perhaps singing), "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Here is our word, "PEACE."

Now let us put all of the parts together and see what we are to understand about this "peace."

1. The only way for men to have "peace" is for God to be glorified.
 

(Note how so often at Christmas the first part of verse 14 is omitted while the last part is retained.)
2. This peace not only glorifies God, but it comes from God. Man did not ask for it. Most men were not expecting it. No one deserved it--not even the shepherds! It was a sovereign act of God. The only true peace is the peace of God. It comes from Him.
3. It is a peace with God here and now--on this earth.
4. It is a peace which comes only through Christ the Lord.
5. It is a peace resulting from salvation from sin.
6. It is a peace designed and prepared for certain people on the earth. This is brought out by three things which the angels said:
  - a. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.  
The reason the angel of the Lord was sent to the shepherds was because they were the elect of God.
  - b. But notice also, "I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all THE people," as the Greek text has it.  
Cf. Rom. 9:22-26.
  - c. The last has to do with the translation of v. 14, the latter part of the verse.  
The NASB renders it:  
" . . . and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."  
The NIV has it:

" . . . and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Thus we see that the Saviour's work was not to be in vain, but that there would be those throughout history who would hear and respond to this message of peace through the saving work of Him Who is Christ the Lord!

But there is one more point:

### III. THE SATISFACTION OF THE SHEPHERDS (Luke 2:15-20).

This is for our encouragement. Everything was in accordance with what the angels said. And then left giving evidence that their faith was in the Saviour because they were "glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen" (v. 20).

Concl: CAN THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH? Yes, thank God, there can!

It is the peace of God--a peace with God. It is a lasting peace, an inner peace, a peace through Jesus Christ, a peace that comes as a result of salvation from sin. His work was not wasted. The message is going out generation after generation to a chosen people, a prepared people, a people who will believe because of the working of God in His sovereign grace upon the hearts of those whom He has chosen and given to His Son.

How do we know who and where the elect are? By the providential leading of the Lord, just as miraculous and just as certain as the mission of the angels to the shepherds.

And what is our message? "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

This afternoon I just heard a brief part of Dr. Johnson's message on the radio, and he was revelling in this verse found in John 6:37--with which I close:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me,  
and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

The shepherds heard of Christ. Then they came to Christ. And they found Him Who was seeking them. And they left glorifying God for the salvation they had received.