

March 6th, 2022

“God’s Grace Revealed”

Luke 1:5-15

Last week, in **Luke 1:1-4**, I introduced you to Luke, the author of the Gospel According to Luke, and The Acts of the Apostles. Luke, a Gentile and a physician, was not one of the original 12 Disciples, nor was he a prophet or an apostle; he was the traveling companion of the Apostle Paul and he interviewed many eyewitnesses of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ; after which, Luke wrote down an accurate, comprehensive, and chronological narrative, as God’s Spirit moved him to record what God desired to reveal to us.

In **Luke 1:5-15**, God sets the background for the coming birth of John the Baptizer. John is the major historical and theological connection between the Old and New Testaments, because John fulfills a major prophecy concerning the Messiah, the Christ, God’s Son.

Isaiah 40:3, “A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.’”

This prophecy given in Isaiah (700 years before Christ’s birth) is recorded in all four Gospel Accounts (pp. **Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23**).

Israel had waited centuries for the Messiah to come; He being the only means of salvation, the only provision through which mankind could be justified, i.e., made righteous in the eyes of God.

Most of those in Israel rejected the gracious provision of God to be acceptable to Him through faith; instead, Israel turned to sacrifices, ceremonies, and laws, in an attempt to earn or acquire salvation by works, apart from faith that God approves.

Hebrews 11:1-3, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” **6**, “And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

You see, it is God who rewards [blesses] us. We cannot, through our own efforts, become acceptable to God; it is only through the shed blood of God’s own Son that we are able to receive grace from God.

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Think about Israel, God’s called out people of the promise made to Abraham, that would be fulfilled through Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, through whom would come Jesus Christ. God brought Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, and during the 40 years of wandering in the desert God was with them; as a pillar of smoke by day, and a pillar of flame by night, God’s presence was with them.

When God brought them into the Promised Land, He established them as the nation belonging to God; His presence was in the Holy of Holies. But over time, Israel turned to their own ways of seeking and serving God, using religious rituals and acts of piety to attain some self-imposed righteousness, causing them to harden their hearts toward God, so that, finally, after repeated warnings, God departed Israel, after which, He sent no prophet or angel for 400 years.

The coming of John marks the time when God began to speak to His people again, to call them back through repentance.

There had been a spiritual famine in Israel since the Book of Malachi was completed, and John would be the one who God would use to get Israel’s attention; he would be the forerunner of the Messiah, in order to direct Israel’s attention to Jesus, the only One who can forgive sin and grant eternal life.

Read Luke 1:5a... Herod I (Herod the Great) was declared king of Judea in 40 B.C. Herod was not a Jew, but instead an Edomite (descendant of Esau); although his wife was a Jew from a wealthy and prestigious family in Judea.

Herod was ruthless, merciless, and he was insanely jealous of anyone else who became popular among the people, even his own family members; Herod murdered his mother-in-law, his wife, and two of his sons, just to name a few. Augustus Caesar is reported to have said, “It is better to be [one of] Herod’s dog[s] [rather] than one of his children.”

It is this same Herod (cf. **Matthew 2:16**), who had all the male babies in the vicinity of Bethlehem slaughtered (ages 2 and under), in accordance with the proposed time of Jesus’ birth.

Read Luke 1:5b-7... Luke’s narrative now moves from Herod a megalomaniacal king, to Zacharias a humble priest, who was from the division of Abijah.

Note: The priesthood of Israel was organized into 24 divisions for priestly duties in service at the Temple (cf. **1Chronicles 24:1-19**). But after Israel’s return to Judah from their Babylonian captivity, only 4 of the divisions returned (cf. **Ezra 2:36-38**); so, those 4 had to be divided into 24 divisions, of which, Zacharias was assigned to the division of Abijah.

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We are told in **Luke 1:5**, that Zacharias had a wife named Elizabeth, and she was from the daughters of Aaron, i.e., she was a descendant of Aaron (the first priest of Israel, in the 14th Century BC) and therefore most of the men in her family were priests, as were the men in the family of Zacharias.

Luke tells us (**verses 6-7**), Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous in God’s sight, meaning they kept the commandments and lived in a manner that pleased God; but even so, they were barren and had no children.

In the Jewish culture, to not be able to produce children was considered a curse, thought to be the result of sin in the life of either the husband or wife, of both. Zacharias and Elizabeth are also said to be advanced in years, and so a pregnancy and birth of a child was not likely to happen.

Read Luke 1:8-10... Zacharias is performing his normal duties as a priest of Israel, but also a special task, having been selected (by lot), to enter the Holy Place and burn incense each morning and evening, at the altar just outside of the Holy of Holies (Most Holy Place).

Note: The Most Holy Place, was where the High Priest of Israel met with God one day each year, on the Day of Atonement, on behalf of the sins of the Nation of Israel.

While Zacharias was inside the Holy Place, just outside the Most Holy Place, offering incense to God on the altar, there were many people outside praying, waiting for Zacharias to return and tell them if he had received a word from God.

Read Luke 1:11-14... While Zacharias was carrying out his duties, “an angel of the Lord appears” standing near the altar of incense.

Note: The last time an angel appeared to a priest was in a vision to Zechariah, as recorded in the Book of Zechariah, the next to last Book the OT, just before the Book of Malachi. Zecharias’s event occurred some 500 years before that of Zacharias, here in Luke 1.

Zacharias was frightened, and rightly so, for no other priest, since the days of Zechariah had experienced a word from God through an angel Zacharias (**verse 12**) was “very troubled” and “gripped with fear.”

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The angel speaks to Zacharias (**verses 13-14**), telling him not to be afraid, and although he and Elizabeth were barren, they would have a son and were to name him John [*lit. God is gracious*].

This news from God’s angel must have brought great joy and gladness to Zacharias, Elizabeth, and their priestly families; for John would be forerunner of God’s Grace returning to Israel.

Next week we’ll return to **Luke 1:15**, to explore its meaning more fully, but today I want to give you a preview of what that verse contains.

Luke 1:15, “For he [John] will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.”

God’s Presence and His Blessings were removed from Israel over 400 years before Zacharias meets this angel, and now, he is told that he and Elizabeth will be blessed with a son, who they are to name, “God is Gracious.”

Luke tells us that John “will be great in the sight of the Lord.” But what does that mean? Well, first of all, notice that it is said that he will drink no wine or liquor.

In **Leviticus 10:9**, Aaron (Israel’s first High Priest) is commanded, “Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations.”

But John, who is to be born to Zacharias and Elizabeth is never to drink wine or liquor [strong drink].

Luke goes on to tell us that John, “will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.”

No one, up to this time, was ever filled with the Holy Spirit; for the Holy Spirit was first sent to the believers in the upper room, on the Day of Pentecost, to fill them and remain in them, marking them as belonging to God.

There were only two people who had the Holy Spirit living in them even before they were born: John the Baptizer, and his younger cousin Jesus Christ.

This announcement to Zacharias meant that God was indeed returning to Israel, not in a pillar of smoke, or a pillar of fire, or as a presence in the Holy of Holies; but in the body of a Son of Man to be named Jesus; for He would be God in the flesh.

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The one to herald the beginning of the Messiah's Ministry, would be none other than John the Baptizer, son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, the one who would declare at the commencement of Jesus Ministry (**John 1:29**), "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

The question for you, as we approach the Lord's Table today, is this: have you repented of your sin, believing in Jesus Christ as Savior, trusting Him alone to forgive all your sins and grant you eternal life.

Scripture clearly declares this in **Romans 3:10-12, 23; 6:23; 5:8; 8:1; 10:9-10, 13**; and in **Hebrews 9:27; 10:12, 14, 17**.

If you aren't sure about your relationship with God, ask Him, right now, to forgive your sins and save your soul. He turns no one away!

Pastor Mike

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