

Today
For you
A Saviour



'Getting ready for Jesus'

Luke 1.^{5-25, 57-79}

Background

Where does the story of Jesus begin? Mark, writing for a no-nonsense Roman constituency, begins with, effectively, the start of Jesus' public ministry. John, by contrast, starts right back in eternity. Matthew, with a Jewish audience in view, sees the story beginning with the foundational promise made to Abram. And Luke, the Gentile doctor with a heart for the healing of the nations, begins with the remarkable circumstances surrounding the birth of John whom we come to know as 'the Baptist'.

We do well to consider in each case why it was that the author started where he did, for clearly there was nothing random about it. In Luke's gospel record more than half of his lengthy opening chapter (45 of the 80 verses) is taken up with an account of the birth, not of Jesus, but of the one who will be His 'outrider', John the Baptist. And before we get to the public ministry of Jesus Himself, there's a further half-chapter narrating (in greater detail and at greater length than the other gospel writers) the substance of John's ministry. Why this focus on John?

Two considerations help us answer the question and enable us to see the significance.

First, there's Luke's declared purpose in writing his gospel: his aim is to help a man called Theophilus "*know the certainty of the things you have been taught*" (Lk.1.4) and clearly that involves the man appreciating something of the thrust of John's ministry.

Then, secondly, it's important to note the striking and distinctive feature of Luke's account of the ministry which John exercised: Luke's emphasis is on the *practicality* of John's preaching: three times the question is asked, "*what should we do?*" (Lk.3.10, 12, 14).

John's ministry was self-evidently preparatory. And we do well in the run-up to Christmas to see the importance of ensuring that we too are 'ready' – by perhaps similarly asking "what should we do?" Are there areas or issues in our lives which we need to address in view of the coming of the King? Are we 'a people prepared for the Lord'?

Try to read the whole of Luke 1 if you have the opportunity, including the middle section (vv.26-56): but if time's short start with '**days**' (2), (5) & (7).

1) Monday 18th December – righteous in God’s sight

Read [Luke 1.5-10](#)

“.. observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly ..” (Lk.1.7)

The story begins with an elderly, childless couple. Disappointment and grief didn’t fill their horizons: they sought simply to honour the Lord in all the daily business of their lives, leaving the burdens of their hearts with Him. Live like that and see God work!

Why do you think Luke starts his gospel record with this particular narrative?

God is sovereign in His providences: in what ways have you been aware of the Lord’s sovereign over-ruling in your circumstances?

Prayer: *Help me to remember, Lord, how sovereign You are and how pleased You are quietly to be at work in all that I will be doing throughout today. Use me in Your service.*

2) Tuesday 19th December – patient in hope

Read [Luke 1.11-17](#)

“.. to make ready a people prepared for the Lord ..” (Lk.1.17)

The Lord is big on preparation! Zechariah and Elizabeth were to prepare their son for ministry, through which he would prepare the people at large for the coming of the King. The fruit of God’s work through you may only be seen in future generations.

In an age which looks for instant results, do you find it more frustrating or encouraging that you may not live to see the real fruit of your service of God?

In the light of this passage, what might you profitably pray for Christian parents as they raise their children in today’s society?

In what ways would John minister “in the spirit and power of Elijah”?

Is there a need and a place for that sort of ministry today?

Is there a ‘preparatory’ work to be done in the hearts of people before they come to the point of acknowledging Jesus as Lord?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the gift of every child: guard and nurture them as they grow: give all needed grace to those who are seeking to raise their children for Christ.*

3) Wednesday 20th December – the great silence

Read [Luke 1.18-20](#)

“.. because you did not believe my words ..” (Lk.1.20)

Zechariah's story will become the story of the gospel. Humanity was called to be God's priest over all creation, but refused to believe His word – and was thereby rendered mute. The gospel is the story of people finding their voice in praise and proclamation.

What was it that warranted such a severe consequence for Zechariah?

Read [Rom.3.19](#): in what ways is Luke right to see in Zechariah a picture of humanity?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Your Word. Help me to read Your Word regularly, to ponder it constantly, to trust it implicitly, and to obey it carefully through each day.

4) Thursday 21st December – God at work!

Read [Luke 1.21-25](#)

“.. ‘the Lord has done this for me,’ she said ..” (Lk.1.25)

An answer to prayer (see v.13). A part in the great, unfolding purpose of God. They couldn't fathom all that was going on, but they knew enough to realise that the Lord was at work, and that they were caught up in the story. Trust Him for that always.

Zechariah and Elizabeth enjoyed a season of silence and seclusion: are there ways in which you might make time and space for such a season in your life?

In what ways are you able to see the Lord at work in and through your life?

Prayer: How wonderful are all Your ways, O Lord! How gracious have been all Your dealings with me across the years! Grant me grace to see Your hand at work in my life.

5) Friday 22nd December – the obedience of faith

Read [Luke 1.57-66](#)

“.. to everyone's astonishment, he wrote, ‘His name is John’ ..” (Lk.1.63)

John – ‘The Lord is gracious’. The elderly couple insist on the God-given name: *grace* is the keynote of the gospel; as they affirm and embrace that grace, the place erupts in praise. Tongues are loosed. Lives are changed. Hope is born. Grace is liberating!

If Zechariah was mute and Elizabeth (quite possibly) illiterate, how did she know to insist that “He is to be called John!”?

What steps have you been prompted to take in faith in obedience to a clear call of God, to the surprise and perhaps the perplexity of others?

Names are important (note the four references here to ‘name’ – vv.59, 61, 62, 63): have we lost sight of the ‘prophetic’ significance of naming a child?

The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives loosens our lips in praise, prayer and proclamation: what has been your experience of that?

Prayer: You have set me free to praise You, Lord! Help me in all I say and do to declare Your praises as the God who has brought me out of darkness into Your marvelous light.

6) Saturday 23rd December – praise the Lord!

Read [Luke 1.67-75](#)

“.. to enable us to serve Him without fear ..” (Lk.1.74)

Sometimes we need time to reflect: make time for that in the busy-ness of these days. The man had 9 months to ponder it all – and the wonder of what God was doing thrills him to the core. A mercy-driven salvation which meets our needs and gives us a future.

What do these verses teach you about the salvation of God?

How has the truth that we are saved to serve found expression in your life?

Prayer: How worthy You are of the praise and homage of my heart, O God! Make me mindful always of how rich You are in mercy, and how good You are to Your people.

7) Sunday 24th December – salvation

Read [Luke 1.76-79](#)

“.. to give His people the knowledge of salvation ..” (Lk.1.77)

The gospel is not simply truth to be grasped, but a life to be known. Salvation is not a philosophy, but an experience. Your sins forgiven. Your darkness dispelled. Your feet set on the path of peace. Jesus came that you might have life – life in all its fulness!

John’s ministry (“you will be called a prophet of the Most High”) will become the ministry of the church (see Acts 2.17-18): what should that mean for the life of the church today and the priorities we pursue?

What would John aim to do, according to his father, Zechariah, in preparing the way for the Lord?

How do you give people ‘the knowledge of salvation’?

What has been your experience of being ‘guided into the path of peace’ as a believer?

Prayer: O God of peace, make me holy in every way, that my whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Great is Your faithfulness!