

## Luke 1D

- Elizabeth has given birth to the promised son, and now the time for circumcision on the eighth day has arrived
- As the family and friends are all gathered around for the circumcision, she and her husband call the child John by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
  - John has remained mute and most likely deaf for the entire 9 months of pregnancy
  - And suddenly he finds himself free from God's discipline and ready to speak to the world concerning God and, interestingly, both his son and the son of his wife's relative, Mary

[Luke 1:63](#) And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished.

[Luke 1:64](#) And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he *began* to speak in praise of God.

[Luke 1:65](#) Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.

[Luke 1:66](#) All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child *turn out to be*?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

- God purposed to silence Zacharias in the temple in response to Zacharias' doubt of the angel's word
  - His doubting heart robbed God of glory and praise he deserved
  - And it had the effect of demanding proof from God – a test, in order words
- God's discipline of Zacharias dealt with his mistake and at the same time accomplished at least two other good purposes
  - First, God was true to His character in chastising disobedience and disbelief through His decision to silence Zacharias
    - Zacharias became a public spectacle for those nine months, receiving the misery of God's chastisement, all the time considering the words he spoke in the temple and regretting them

- God's punishment was so appropriate because it dealt with the problem – rash speech – and gave Zacharias plenty of opportunity to consider his mistake and repent
- Remember Paul's words in Romans:

[Rom. 2:4](#) Or do you think lightly of the riches of His **kindness** and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the **kindness** of God leads you to repentance?

- What proof do we have of Zacharias' repentance? He names the baby John, which the angel had instructed him to do – proof of his acceptance of God's word through the angel
- Secondly, despite Zacharias' error, God still received His proper glory, and in fact, His glory was magnified even further because of Zacharias' error
  - At the point when Zacharias first heard the news from the angel in the temple, he was alone – completely alone
  - Now had he responded in faith in that moment, God would have received glory from Zacharias and later the world would have given God glory as Zacharias testified about it
  - Since Zacharias didn't praise God and he was silenced, he became a spectacle as punishment
  - Later, God used that spectacle to magnify His own glory by returning Zacharias' voice in a very and miraculous way public way, with many people watching
    - As John was named while Zacharias was deaf and mute, it gave God glory
    - Then as his voice was restored, it gave God glory as it was seen as a supernatural healing
    - And then we see how God receives the glory for the miraculous gift of John as the people realize that the family had been involved in something miraculous (v 65)
- Finally, God used this entire situation to bring special attention to John's birth and his God-appointed purpose

- In verse 66 the people begin to connect the dots and wonder what will become of a child so obviously brought by miraculous circumstances
- God was glorified in much greater ways and His purpose to bring John was even enhanced by Zacharias' disobedience and doubt
- Does not God turn all things to good??

[Luke 1:67](#) ¶ And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

[Luke 1:68](#) "Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel,

For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,

[Luke 1:69](#) And has raised up a horn of salvation for us

In the house of David His servant—

[Luke 1:70](#) As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—

[Luke 1:71](#) Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES,

And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;

[Luke 1:72](#) To show mercy toward our fathers,

And to remember His holy covenant,

[Luke 1:73](#) The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,

[Luke 1:74](#) To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies,

Might serve Him without fear,

[Luke 1:75](#) In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

- Like Elizabeth and Mary, Zacharias finds himself filled by the Holy Spirit and begins to prophesy, we're told
  - Zacharias' outburst differs from the women's in that his speech
    - His is a combination of showing fulfillment of prophecy and providing new prophecy
    - The women gave praise without significant prophecy
  - Zacharias is being used by God to deliver the real meaning of these events in the course of giving God thanks and praise
- Interestingly, Zacharias begins talking about a baby that's not his own – Mary's unborn baby

- While it might seem strange from a worldly perspective, Zacharias' decision to start with Jesus makes perfect sense
  - Zacharias' child has only one purpose – to foretell of Christ
  - Without Christ, John the Baptist has no reason to exist
  - So naturally, The HS begins Zacharias' speech with the true purpose for his son's birth – Christ's coming arrival
- He calls Christ the horn of salvation, a quote from Psalms 18, the same place Christ is called my rock, shield, refuge, stronghold
- And he declares that God is bringing the Messiah to fulfill His Holy Covenant – specifically the covenant given to Abraham

[Gen. 22:16](#) and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,

[Gen. 22:17](#) indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

[Gen. 22:18](#) "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

- Paul explains the full meaning of those verses in Galatians:

[Gal. 3:16](#) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

- When we see Zacharias saying that God has remembered His holy covenant with Abraham, it means that God has remembered to bring the seed that Paul explains is Christ

- Now Zacharias finally turns to his own son.

[Luke 1:76](#) "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;

[Luke 1:77](#) To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation

By the forgiveness of their sins,

[Luke 1:78](#) Because of the tender mercy of our God,

With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,  
[Luke 1:79](#) TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF  
DEATH,

To guide our feet into the way of peace.”  
[Luke 1:80](#) ¶ And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived  
in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

- Now begins Zacharias' prophetic pronouncements concerning his son John
  - John the Baptist was to be the prophet of the Most High
    - He is the one appointed to specifically foretell of the Messiah's arrival
    - To prepare the way of the Lord
- How was John to "prepare the Lord's way?"
  - Actually, John prepares the way of the Lord in at least a couple of ways
    - First, he provided a physical preparation, as the angel announced to Zacharias

[Luke 1:17](#) "It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

- John's clearing of a path filled a very real practical need
  - When the Lord began his ministry in AD30, he found Himself in a world largely dead to the knowledge of the living God
    - The world was dominated by a pagan world power, the Roman Empire
    - Which itself had been preceded by another pagan world power, Greece
    - Which itself had been preceded by another pagan world power, the Medo-Persians, etc.
  - Even within Palestine, the Jewish people had long been ruled by sects of self-righteous men
    - They carried out the law as a yoke to burden men
    - They taught of a Messiah who would conquer the Romans through political overthrow

- And they defined righteousness in hypocritical ways, seeking to keep themselves above the people
  - In this climate, true faith was crushed and true understanding of God's purposes was nearly lost
- God wished His Son to be met by an understanding and watchful people who were waiting for Him
  - They should be understanding of their own sinfulness, rather than proclaiming their righteousness
  - They should be understanding of their need for salvation from God, rather than claiming righteousness for themselves by their works
  - Verse 77 says exactly that
  - Essentially, John would take what little remnant remained in Israel and build it up in anticipation of Christ's coming
- It's worth noting how much our world reflects the one that existed immediately before Christ's first coming
  - Our world is dominated by pagan culture – even Christian pagan culture in many forms
  - A true knowledge of God and His Word is rapidly fading from many places
    - Thought we may have trouble believing this, given how much attention we ourselves give to scripture, it's true
    - Even our Christian culture is also largely ignorant of the God of the Bible and His word
  - Many people who claim to be Christian are often just modern day Pharisees
    - People don't believe in sin or even absolute moral laws
    - People don't recognize their need for a savior
    - Righteousness has returned to an external act for many people, according to man-made rules

- So in addition to many other signs given by scripture to testify that we are in the end times, I see further proof in this fact
  - That our world has as much need for a John the Baptist to prepare a path for our Lord's return as the Roman world had before Christ's first coming
  - And in fact, that's exactly what scripture says, as we studied a few weeks ago
    - Malachi told us that the Lord will send Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord to prepare people for His second coming
- Now Luke's attention will turn to the birth of Jesus...

[Luke 2:1](#) ¶ Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

[Luke 2:2](#) This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

[Luke 2:3](#) And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

[Luke 2:4](#) Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,

[Luke 2:5](#) in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

- Luke's second chapter opens with the historical context for Jesus' birth
  - We should begin by reviewing a little political history of that time
    - The region of Palestine was a province of Rome at the time of Christ's birth
    - A province was considered a holding of the Roman Empire – a territory under Roman rule and obligated to pay taxes to Rome but denied full citizenship and protection of the law
      - It would be comparable to the American colonies under British authority
      - There was a limited degree of autonomy but always with Roman governors ruling
      - Palestine was essentially split according in three provinces, which dated back to the Alexandrian Empire



- Syria to the north
- Judea in the middle
- And Nabatea in the Sinai to the south
- Each had its own Roman governor
- The emperor of the entire Roman empire was the Caesar, in this case Caesar Augustus – who issued the decree for a Empire-wide census
  - There had been other Roman censuses before, but this was the first census to include the provinces
  - Census were done because the Roman Empire would tax its various territories and provinces according to the number of people living there
    - The Caesar would assess a certain tax on the province and the governor was obligated to pay it
    - The governor then had to collect what he could from the province to pay Caesar, and anything more he could collect became his own wealth
    - This is why tax collectors were so despised because they operated on commission, something like an organized crime syndicate
  - So Augustus' census was designed to set new tax rates according to the number of subjects in each territory
- Luke also ties this event to the rule of the governor of Syria, Cyrenius
  - Luke probably did this because this governor had a relatively short reign, only 2 years from 3-2 BC, giving us a much more precise timeline for the birth of Christ
- But Luke's record does introduce a dilemma as well
  - And though Luke doesn't mention it here, the governor of Judea at the time of Christ's birth was Herod the Great – Matthew tells us this
    - History also records that Herod the Great dies in 4 BC,
    - So Christ must have been born around or slightly before 4 BC

- But history also tells us that Cyrinius was governor of Syria from 3-2 BC,
  - So how could Jesus be born while Cyrinius was governor and while Herod the Great was alive, yet Herod died before Cyrinius was governor?
- Well, the answer comes from the language in the text
  - In verse 2 we're told that this was the first census while Cyrinius was governor
    - The word for first, protos, has several possible meanings in Greek
    - It can mean "first," but it can also mean "prior" or "former"
    - In other words, the second verse could be understood to mean the census was taken "prior" to Cyrinius becoming governor, which would make sense
- In the end, all the evidence points to Jesus' birth occurring around 5 BC
- Shortly before Jesus' birth, they set out from Nazareth for Bethlehem, about 70 miles
  - This trip was very similar to the one Mary took 6 months earlier when she visited Elizabeth
  - Joseph brings Mary, but this is an interesting fact in itself
    - Joseph was engaged to Mary (bethrothed) though she was with child
      - He had not consummated the wedding, which would have been the normal thing to do
      - Wither he would have abandoned her or married her quickly to save her the embarrassment of being pregnant while engaged
    - Meanwhile, they would not normally spend time together in advance of their wedding, so a long trip together would have been very unusual

- Mary's condition would have left her despised and scorned, and so it's likely that Joseph brought her along to protect her and provide support – treating as a wife but not calling her his wife
- This would have left Joseph looking like a fool to everyone – a sucker, someone with no self respect
- As Paul tells of his own experience:

[1Cor. 4:9](#) For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

[1Cor. 4:10](#) We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

[1Cor. 4:11](#) To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

[1Cor. 4:12](#) and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

[1Cor. 4:13](#) when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now.

- You could say that Joseph was the first fool for Christ
- Joseph was returning to Bethlehem, because the census required that each person return to their ancestral home
  - For Joseph, as a member of the tribe of Judah, his ancestral home was Bethlehem, although he may never have lived there himself
  - Bethlehem was the city of David's birth, and in Micah 5:2 we learn that the Messiah was to be born there

[Mic. 5:2](#) “But as for you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah,  
 Too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
 From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.  
 His goings forth are from long ago,  
 From the days of eternity.”

- Was God simply telling us of what would happen, or did God want the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem?

- This is important because it cuts to the core of what it means to be God – simply knowing the future or controlling the future?
- Consider the significance of why Jesus would be born in Bethlehem
  - He is a son of David and comes to rule like his “father” David
  - But He will be greater than David (Matt 22:45)
  - And so David is a picture of the Messiah ruling over a united Israel

- If David is a picture of the Messiah, then even David's birthplace must have been used to picture the coming Christ
  - Since David was born in Bethlehem, God intended to bring the Christ from that town as well
  - So God must have been in control of even the circumstances surrounding the census to ensure that Joseph would learn Nazareth in time for the birth
- More importantly, why was Jesus brought up in Nazareth then. Why not be raised in Bethlehem?
  - We turn to Matt 2 to gain insight on this question
  - In Matt 2:23 we hear:

[Matt. 2:23](#) and came and lived in a city called **Nazareth**. *This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."*

- However, there is no reference in OT scripture to the Messiah being a Nazarene, nor is there even a single reference to the town of Nazareth – not one
- So why was Matthew saying and what prophecy was he referring to?
- Again, the language is a key for us here as is some cultural understanding
  - The word Nazarene was commonly given to anyone who originated from the general region of Nazareth
  - Over the centuries the region became associated with despised and lowly people
    - Perhaps there is some lost history to explain this association
    - Perhaps it comes from the nazirite vows given in Numbers 6
      - The word Nazirite means consecrated or devote one

- It was a practice one could take to devote oneself completely to the Lord for a period of time
  - To show you were under such a vow, you wouldn't cut your hair or drink wine
  - We know, however that Christ was not under such a vow, at least as an adult since He drank wine
- Those under such a vow would be shunned, much like John the Baptist was because of how he separated himself in the wilderness
- But the entomologies of the word Nazirite and Nazarene are actually different, so this connection is shaky at best
  - For whatever reason, Nazarenes were despised and thought as lowly
    - And here is where I believe Matt is showing the fulfillment of scripture with Christ
    - Jesus was lowly and despised because He came from Nazareth
      - Remember they said of him in John "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"
      - He is always thought of as lowly and without honor
    - And this coincides with much Scripture

[Psa. 22:1](#) ¶ My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?  
Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.

[Psa. 22:2](#) O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer;  
And by night, but I have no rest.

[Psa. 22:3](#) Yet You are holy,  
O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

[Psa. 22:4](#) In You our fathers trusted;  
They trusted and You delivered them.

[Psa. 22:5](#) To You they cried out and were delivered;  
In You they trusted and were not disappointed.

[Psa. 22:6](#) ¶ But I am a worm and not a man,  
A reproach of men and despised by the people.

- Or in Isaiah 49:

[Is. 49:7](#)        Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel *and* its Holy One,  
To the despised One,  
To the One abhorred by the nation,  
To the Servant of rulers,  
“Kings will see and arise,  
Princes will also bow down,  
Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.”

- Christ was despised for our sake, and in that the prophets testified to his being a Nazarene, though without using the word itself
  - Jesus had to be a Nazarene – he had to be despised – because He had to die – because our sins required it
  - He has a time to come win glory and to rule, but it had to be preceded by a cruel death – or he would have had no one to rule over in His kingdom
  - For all would have been deserving of death rather than life with their King