



Sermon-Based Study Guide  
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Good Shepherd Church - December 18, 2011

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Sermon Title: Christmas Salvation

Sermon Text: Luke 1.67-80  
Related Texts: Isaiah 40.1-11; Psalm 105

## I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

What's in a name? Are you named for a relative or particular person? Do you know what your name means?

## II. Introduction

God has acted in a dramatic way, carrying out a response to the plea of Isaiah 64.1, "Oh that you (Lord) would rend the heavens and come down..." Luke sees that God has done this through the events unfolding beginning with Zechariah and Elizabeth, then in the life of a young woman named Mary, and continuing as Mary and Elizabeth meet. Now Luke shifts the focus once again to Zechariah and shows God "rending the heavens and coming down" when a child who is to be named John is born.

## III. Study the Context – Read Luke 1.57-66

- 1) This is the immediate context for the passage upon which we are focusing this week. Mary has departed from Elizabeth and is making her way back to Nazareth. Elizabeth goes into labor and bears a son. Take a look at Genesis 17.9-12 regarding the act of circumcision on the eighth day following the birth (according to Leviticus 12.3, the eighth day is one day after the ceremonial "uncleanness" of the mother, the earliest she could enter the Temple).
- 2) Look at verses 60 through 63. In addition to circumcision - the sign of the covenant relationship of Israel with God - what other significant event do you see taking place on this day?
- 3) Two things are out of the ordinary in this account. First, names of babies are usually given at their birth. Here it does not happen until the eighth day. Second, sons usually were given their father's name as Luke highlights. Why do you think Zechariah's "mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed..." (verse 63) upon his writing that the boy is to be named John? How might this be related to Luke 1.18-20? By the way, the name John is the Greek version of the Hebrew name "Hanan" which means "the Lord is gracious."

#### IV. Study the Text – Read Luke 1.67-80

- 1) Notice the reference to Zechariah being filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesying or forth-telling God's word cited in verse 67? Where else has Luke cited people being filled with the Holy Spirit in this opening chapter? Why do you think he details this so thoroughly?
- 2) Luke 1.68 through 75 is Zechariah's "benedictus" or song of praise (from the Latin word that translates "praise be"). Look through these verses and identify the character qualities and specific actions of God to which Zechariah responds in praise.
- 3) Two words stand out in these verses - "redeemed" and "salvation". How would you define "redeemed" or "redemption"? How does Zechariah's song define "salvation"?

Note: "Salvation" is the Greek word "soteria" and is one of Luke's favorite words and is found throughout his telling of the good news. It means "deliverance from all kinds of ills including enemies, oppressors, evil... and sin. Luke may have been drawn to this word because of its implication that salvation leads to being well or healed. Luke, the physician, may have seen special significance in Jesus the Savior who makes people whole and truly well - in relationship with God and within the Kingdom (or rule) of God in the world.

- 4) What do verses 76 through 79 reveal about the mission of John? How does this fulfill the description of God's prophet found in Isaiah 40.1-11?
- 5) Verse 77 introduces an aspect of salvation as "the forgiveness of their sins..." How does this kind of salvation complement salvation from enemies or oppressors? In what ways is sin an enemy and an oppressor?

#### V. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) How has God "opened your mouth and loosed your tongue... leading to praise of God? How would you rate yourself on a "praise scale" of 1 to 10... 10 being a level like Zechariah's Benedictus?
- 2) Salvation has to do with being freed from oppression - the oppression of enemies, of sin, of unhealthiness of spirit and soul, and of spiritual death. Are there was in which you need a more complete experience of God's salvation through Jesus Christ?
- 3) Luke 1.78 refers to the "tender mercy of our God." Are you dealing with circumstances that call for God's tender mercy? Can you articulate that to God, asking in prayer for the Lord's tender mercy?
- 4) When you reflect on the ways God used unlikely and ordinary people like Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, even John to carry out the divine plan of salvation, do you think that God can use you in ways that serve the Lord's purposes?

As you reflect on the tender mercy of God, the forgiveness of sins, and the way God has rescued you (redeemed) from darkness and spiritual death does a song of praise come to mind? Would you be willing to try to compose such a song on the lines below (or on the back)?

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