

**Text:** Luke 1:67-79

**Title:** The Benedictus and The True Meaning of Christmas

**Truth:** Christmas means that God deserves our worship.

**Date/Location:** Sunday Dec. 24, 2006 and Dec. 27, 2020 (rev) at FBC

## Introduction

The term *Benedictus* is used to refer to Zacharias' prophecy after he regained his ability to speak when John the Baptist was eight days old. Like the *Magnificat*, the title comes from the Latin of the first word of his proclamation, which means "blessed be" God.

It had been three months since Mary pronounced her Magnificat, and another six months would pass before Jesus was to be born. But Zacharias picks up seemingly right where Mary left off. She spoke about Israel and the promises to Abraham which God did not forget. Zacharias mentions the same promises, showing that the events he was witnessing were simply the fulfillment of earlier promises made to Abraham and King David.

Whereas Mary's Magnificat called God her "Savior," Zacharias focuses on God's provision of the Messiah in fulfillment of His promises. Messiah would be the "horn of salvation" to fulfill God's promised mercies. Mary gave some attention to her own situation and how God helped her as well as all those who fear God. Zacharias gives attention to John the Baptist and the entire nation.

Zacharias' speech emphasizes the idea of salvation—it uses the terms *saved*, *delivered*, and *salvation*. To an Israelite, salvation would naturally be thought of in two dimensions—physical deliverance and spiritual deliverance. We can see both the physical and spiritual aspects of salvation in Zacharias' prophecy.

A faithful Jewish person would realize that the deliverance from Egypt was a physical deliverance from bondage. It also drew them out of a pagan and idolatrous situation, but it did not "save" them in the spiritual sense. With many of them God was not pleased, and they died in the wilderness because of unbelief (Heb. 3:16-19; 1 Cor. 10:5). When only the physical aspect of salvation is over-

emphasized, spiritual salvation recedes and is often completely forgotten.<sup>1</sup>

## I. Physical Salvation, vv. 68-75

A. Zacharias introduces his speech by speaking of this in general terms in vv. 68-69. Notice that Zacharias speaks in the past tense—God “has visited” (Gen. 21:1; Exodus 3:16, 4:31, 13:19, 20:5) His people. To “visit” is OT language not just meaning “to come and see” but to actually **do** something for someone (see also 1:68). God also has “redeemed” His people (Exodus 15:13) and “raised up a horn of salvation” (2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:2).

Jesus would not be born for another six months. Nevertheless, Zacharias knew by the Spirit (v. 67) that these things prophesied so long ago were now happening. The house of David would rise once again to prominence out of its current obscurity. **Christmas means God visits and redeems His people by providing salvation.**

B. In v. 69-70 and 72-73, the phrases “as He spoke” and “mercy promised” and “remember” and “oath” tell us that **Christmas means that God keeps His word.** He said through the prophets that he was going to provide salvation for Israel, and now He was going about to do it!

1. Prophecy of the House of David. 1000 years before Zacharias, God promised to David a dynasty, people, and peace (2 Sam. 7:8-16).
2. Oath to Abraham. This was over 2000 years before Zacharias. God promised Abraham a nation and blessing to and through him (Gen. 12:1-3). The oath included land (15:18-21) and a great posterity with the sign of circumcision (17:1-16).
3. Zacharias informs us that what was happening with John the Baptist and Jesus was an integral part of these promises.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the problem with the focus on modern political movements. They only promise physical salvation (better living conditions, health care, economy, jobs, etc.) They do *nothing* to provide for the deep need of the human condition, which is sin and salvation from sin into a reconciled relationship with God.

- C. In v. 71 and 74–75, the freshly un-muted prophet mentions their enemies and those who hate them. The Romans were the occupying power at the time, in conjunction with the Idumean family of Herod the Great. The Israelites keenly felt the oppressive rule of these folks. Still today there are many who hate Israel. They need to look beyond themselves and beyond their nuclear capability to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the one who can deliver them from all their enemies. But at least we know this: **Christmas means that God will deliver Israel** from their enemies.
- D. Finally in v. 74b–75, Zacharias says that this deliverance is not just for deliverance’s sake, but that the Jews might serve God in peace and in holiness and righteousness. **Christmas means that God wants his people to serve him all their lives.** To do that, they need to be brought into a state of holiness and righteousness. That is the subject of the next section.

## II. Spiritual Salvation, vv. 76–79

- A. This section opens with a couple of verses about John, the one who would be called “John the Baptist” later in his life. He was a *prophet* of the Most High (1:76). Contrast that with Jesus who is called the *son* of the Most High (1:32).

Think of John as the last in the long line of Old Testament prophets. That line extended from Enoch (Jude 14) through Samuel (Acts 13:20), Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13), through Jeremiah and Isaiah and Ezekiel, to Malachi and Zechariah. There had been some quiet time in Israel for several hundred years, but the prophetic ministry came back with John. God would again speak to His people. **Christmas means that God has spoken again to humanity—not only by John, but in His Son** (Heb. 1:2). By the way, this notion is a clue as to how to look at God’s program—not as two separate testaments but as one unified Bible.

- B. **Christmas means that John the Baptist had a job to do—to call people to repentance** (go before to prepare His ways) **and tell them about the knowledge of salvation** (1:77). He was to go before the Lord and prepare the paths for him by preaching repentance. He was the herald of the coming King and kingdom.

**Christmas means the same for us today: we must tell others about repentance and salvation.**

- C. In v. 77b, salvation comes through the remission of sins. Therefore, **Christmas means that sins are paid and forgiven**, and we can know that they are removed as far from us as the east from the west (Psalm 103:12; see Isaiah 38:17 and Micah 7:19). Without Christmas, there would be no fellowship with God, no heaven, no eternal life, no hope. **Christmas means that sins had to be paid**, for if it were not the case, Christ would not have had to come (like Gal. 2:21).
- D. In v. 78, Zacharias tells us that **Christmas means that God has tender mercy** toward his people. These mercies are brought by Jesus Christ. He is from heaven. He came down to visit mankind on the earth.
- E. Sometimes folks get a little “blue” over the holidays. A good cure for the blues is to get some sunlight—and some SON-light. After all, Jesus is the Dayspring from on high. Verses 78a-79 teach us that Christ brought light and guidance for us (somewhat like Ps. 119:105). We need that, as those who sat in darkness and under the pall of death. We had no release from those bitter enemies. Sin held us in its grasp. It seems clear that **Christmas means God has given light for those who live in darkness**. For those who do not have Christ, it is no surprise that Christmas-time can be somewhat dark. **Christmas also means God guides us in the way of peace—peace with God and with fellow man.**

## **Conclusion**

We do not find here the true meaning of Christmas to entail the materialistic side of things that is all about us. Instead, the focus is on CHRIST. Shame on those who want to take Christ out of Christmas. It cannot really be done unless you dismiss God from the whole picture. But we cannot do that. Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” Zacharias said, “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel.” They explained why they said these things. And so, **Christmas means that God deserves our worship.**

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