

Zechariah's Song: The Wonder of Christmas

Luke 1:57-80

For 400 years, God's people have been waiting for God to speak another word to them. But the LORD has been silent since Malachi preached repentance to a self-focused, spiritually-distant people. Malachi preached a strong message of repentance to hard-hearted souls. AND Malachi prophesied of the hope of a future for Israel.

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. (Malachi 3:1a [ESV](#))

The LORD foretold of a messenger who would prepare the way prior to the arrival of the Messiah King. A forerunner is necessary given the majesty of this Monarch! This messenger rolls out the red carpet for the King to walk upon when He comes.

After promising the messenger who would announce the Savior-Kings arrival, Malachi continues by prophesying about this King:

And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.” (Malachi 3:1b [ESV](#))

This **second messenger** who is called the “messenger of the covenant” is none other than the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the **Refiner's Fire** who will **rescue God's people from Satan's power and purify them for heaven.**

Notice how Malachi prophesies that this Messenger will come “suddenly” . . . that is to say He will come at a time when people are not spiritually awake. Yet Malachi writes with bold pronouncement, **“Behold, He is coming!”**

Now 400 years have passed and the LORD has NOT YET fulfilled His Word on this matter. **We open our Bibles to Luke 1 to hear afresh the story of a humble man and his humble wife.**

The year is 6 or 5 B.C. Herod is the king of Judea. Herod builds a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, but the Temple worship is more of an external show than an inner heart of devotion. A notable exception to this externalism is a man named Zechariah. Z has spent his long life serving the LORD as a devoted priest to the LORD.

Z is extraordinary in his faith and obedience to the Lord. Yet we likely would not notice him if he lived in our day because he lives quietly, under the

radar. He does not occupy a powerful position. He is not recognized as a chief teacher of the Law. He is not a man of prominence. He is a simple man who loves the LORD, loves God's Word and loves his wife.

Luke tells us that both Z and Elizabeth are "righteous before God". This does not mean that they are sinless. It means that they walk by faith in God and obey Him. **God counts their faith as righteousness.**

Now this couple are both "advanced" in years and yet have no child.

Two things happened this week that brought joy to my heart. My daughter and son had their 4th child . . . and I had my 9th grandchild. What joy in little Jace! Then, I had my "one minute" birthday this week. It was my "60 second" birthday. I looked at Kimberly after we spent time holding Jace and asked, *"What do you think? Do you want to try for another one for ourselves? Maybe give Jace another uncle or aunt?"* We are too "advanced" for that.

I think Z and E are 62 . . . Elizabeth particularly feels the reproach of being barren all her childbearing years. E hears the whispers, *"I wonder what secret sin is in E's life? Surely, God is punishing her for some terrible thing. The LORD would given her a child if He were pleased with her!"*

She mourns her childless state; she prays over it; she accepts it by faith.

As a priest, Z. serves the LORD in a village in the hill country of Judea. Two times a year Z's division of priests are assigned the duty of leaving their homes and traveling to Jerusalem where they serve in the Temple for one week. **This is Z's week to serve in Temple with his group.**

When Z arrives in Jerusalem, every priest's name is written on a rock and placed in a bag. Z knows that the name that is drawn identifies the priest who has the sacred and scary privilege of entering the Holy Place in the Temple to keep the incense burning. The priest enters alone and he is **very conscious that if he does anything dishonoring while near the Holy of Holies, that the LORD would take his life.**

Z watches closely as the leader of the priest places his hand into the bag. Z knows that as an old man, he may not have many more opportunities left to serve the LORD in this way and he is hoping that maybe this year would be his turn.

The priest's hand emerges from the bag with a rock and the leader reads, **"Zechariah! Zechariah you will serve in the Holy Place this year."**

Do you think that God is involved in guiding the Temple leaders hand to this particular rock? Of course He is! God places Z in the Holy of Holies.

Z enters the Holy Place. He is all alone in there. **Suddenly, he is not alone!** An angel appears! Z is stunned! The last time an angel had appeared to anyone

was 500 years ago when the prophet Z saw an angel in a series of visions. But here, this Z sees the angel with his own eyes! He trembles and nearly falls over out of terror! The angel speaks to Z,

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” (Luke 1:13–17 [ESV](#))

Now Z is even more incredulous. This is not at all what he is expecting to hear! He incredulously asks: *“How can I know that this is true? I am an old man and my wife is . . . well, I do not want to insult her, but she is “advanced in years.”*

Gabriel rolls his eyes, *“Really? You are asking me to prove to you that the words I tell you are true? “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.”* (Luke 1:19–20 [ESV](#))

This conversation takes some time and the people outside the Holy Place are wondering if something tragic happened to Z. When he FINALLY comes out, he can’t speak. He is making signs to communicate, but it is difficult to get his point across. The people realize that Z had seen some kind of vision in the temple. So Z. completes his week in Jerusalem and returns home to his wife Elizabeth.

Not long after, E. conceives. She keeps herself hidden from people for 5 months saying *““Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”* (Luke 1:25 [ESV](#)).

Around the sixth month, cousin Mary comes to visit the home. As Mary approaches their house, she calls out, *“Elizabeth! It is me Mary. I have come to visit you!”* When the six-month pregnant E hears Mary’s voice, her baby leaps for joy. E is filled with the Holy Spirit and she immediately knows that her baby is jumping with joy inside of her over the baby that Mary is carrying in her womb!!

Elizabeth praises God saying, *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to*

me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” (Luke 1:42-44 [ESV](#)) Mary stays for 3 months and returns to Nazareth.

Finally, E gives birth to a son. Her neighbors and family rejoice with her. What an amazing gift from God!!

Z has been silent all these 9 months. Not a word comes from him. Eight days after the birth of their son, they travel to the Temple to dedicate him to the LORD through circumcision. Jews at this time waited for this occasion to give their baby boy a name. Friends and family who gathered with them all were talking, **“Surely, his name is Zechariah! What a wonderful gift to his daddy to have a son named after him!”** Elizabeth is compelled to reject the thoughts of those who were pressuring her to name her son Z. *“No!! His name will be John!!”*

“What!?! You can’t name him John. No one in your family is named John.” So they look over to Z thinking he would agree with them. They make signs to him asking what Z wants to name his son.

Z asks for a wax tablet. He writes in big letters, **“HIS NAME IS JOHN!”** The name John means, “God is gracious.” God appoints the name John to this boy because the LORD had set apart John to point to the grace of God in bringing Jesus into the world.

What do we learn from Z? We glean so much about God from Z’s life, experience and song.

Main Idea: All the hopes of all humanity are met in Jesus. When Jesus arrives, we have reason to jump with joy and to worship Him.

Zechariah Unveils Two Wonders About God

Wonder #1: God is a God who speaks personally to inform our worship.

Z set himself apart for the worship of the LORD. And the LORD honors him by sending an angel to speak directly to him while Z is in the Holy Place in the Temple. And what a great word the LORD had for him on that day. “Z your prayer has been heard and answered!”

Now this is the only time in Z’s life when this KIND of communication from the Lord came to him. But we know that the Lord spoke to Z all throughout Z’s life. We know that because the song that Z writes is filled with allusions to God’s Word. Z and E were a couple who opened their Bibles to listen to God speak to them.

Does God still speak to us today? Answer: Yes. **The primary way that the Lord speaks to us is through His Son as revealed in God's Word.**

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” (Hebrews 1:1-3 [ESV](#))

God is gracious to communicate to us! In times past, the LORD used various means like angels and dreams and visions. But in the days that we are living, God lovingly speaks to us by His Son!

“The sum is, that God Himself . . . is invisible; and that not only to the physical eyes, but also to human understanding; and that he is revealed to us in Christ alone, . . . For in Christ He shows us His righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, in short, His entire self. We must therefore take care not to seek Him elsewhere; for outside Christ, everything that claims to represent God will be an idol.” — John Calvin

Application: The Christmas season is an invitation from God to turn our eyes, our hearts and our ears to Jesus and to listen to Him.

Jesus is the full revelation of God's communication to us. He is the Word made flesh! God's communication to us is through His Son.

How does Jesus speak personally to us? Hebrews again helps us understand God's means.

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12 [ESV](#))

The only access we have to hear Jesus' voice is through the scriptures. When we humanly create other paths to listen to the voice of Jesus, we will hear the a false Jesus speak to us. The Word is our anchor of truth!

BIG QUESTION: Why does God speak to us? What is God's purpose in His communication to us?

Look at Z! When God speaks to Z, Z's heart is set on fire for worship!

God primarily speaks to us in order to light our heart on fire with a passion for Him. The LORD unveils His truth to INFORM our worship and INVIGORATE our worship.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”” (John 4:23-24 [ESV](#))

The LORD got Z’s attention through the Word that He spoke to Z. And now Z is LOCKED IN to obedience, to service and to praise.

Friend, God created you for His glory and He is interested in growing you as a worshipper? What is the condition of your heart in your worship of the LORD? Is your heart in reverse? Is your heart stalled along the road? Is your heart grinding gears? I want you to know that it is possible to hit on all eight cylinders in your worship.

Application: Christmas provides an opportunity to slow down and ask God to speak to your heart. *“Lord, I want to worship you with all my heart, all my soul and all my strength. Would you speak to me words of instruction, encouragement, correction or rebuke so that I might be revived? Here I am, your servant is listening.”*

Wonder #1: God is a God who speaks personally to inform our worship.

Wonder #2: God is a God who sends His Son to infuse joy into worship.

When Z and E go to the Temple on the eighth day after John is born, Z is still unable to speak. This is the day of their son’s circumcision and it is the day when he receives his name. The family and friends think that E should name him Z after his dad. But E insists, “No! He shall be called John.” They argue, “None of your relatives is called by this name!” And then they turned to Z in hopes that he would override E’s decision on the name. Z asks for a writing tablet and writes “His name is John!” At THAT very moment, God gives Z back the ability to speak. He had not said a word for 3 months. And what does Z do? Z uses his first words to give praise to God!

“And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,” (Luke 1:67 [ESV](#))

Z speaks in lyrical form. This is a song. In the song Z reflects upon the unconditional covenant that the LORD made with Abraham in Genesis 12 and then restated to King David in 2 Samuel 7. **Z reflects that God is now introducing the New Covenant that the LORD unveiled to Jeremiah and Ezekiel.**

And so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Z sings a worship song.

One of the remarkable aspects of this song is that the first part of this song is not about his son, but about Mary's son. In fact, even later when he includes his son in the song, his son plays a secondary role.

Think of this! Z is cradling with joy this 8-day-old baby boy who is his son, his only son . . . a son given miraculously to him. Yet Z uses his first words, not to speak of the specialness of his own son, but to speak of the unique greatness of Mary's child who is yet to be born. **Who does that?**

What dad is more enamored with another's son on the week of their own son's birth? Z. is.

Z. knows that John's mission is a forerunner to the Messiah. Luke 1:76 – Zechariah announces John's mission in life. *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,"* (Luke 1:76 [ESV](#))

Why is Z so focused upon Jesus? Answer: Because Jesus is the Son of the Most High God. As such, Jesus is the cause of our worship. Jesus is the center for our worship. Jesus is the celebration in our worship.

As Z's is unleashed in song, he considers **five happy accomplishments of Jesus that bring joy to His heart.**

Accomplishment #1: Jesus visits us with comfort.

*And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, **for he has visited** and redeemed **his people**"* (Luke 1:67–68 [ESV](#))

The word "visited" is used here to describe a visit that brings help, hope and comfort to the one being visited.

*"I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and **you visited me**, I was in prison and you came to me."* (Matthew 25:36 [ESV](#))

This is what Jesus does when He comes to us. **We have one who always loves us, who always has time for us, always understands us, always has sufficient**

provision, always knows what to say, always knows what to do. No other person can visit us with such sufficient help and hope. Every other person on which we might rely is finite. They too have needs. They too need to be visited. **But Jesus is God of very God. He is infinite in His person and sufficient in His supply.**

When Isaiah prophesies about the Messiah to come, this matter of comfort is a HUGE deal.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD'S hand double for all her sins." (Isaiah 40:1-2 [ESV](#))

Jesus' ministry of comfort is all-sufficient. He comforts us in the heartaches of a world that is broken by sin with sicknesses, death, conflict and poverty. BUT MORE . . . Isaiah teaches us that He comforts us in our failures to obey and honor Him. He speaks TENDERLY to us in the distress of our guilt and shame.

EVERYONE who walks with Jesus KNOWS the ministry of His comfort.

Illustration: My brother Jim's cancer and death.

Truth: When Jesus visits us, He is always enough!

Question: Do you ever feel that you need a visit from someone to bring comfort and provision to your soul? Blessed be the LORD God of Israel for He has VISITED His people!

Accomplishment #1: Jesus visits us with comfort.

Accomplishment #2: Jesus releases us from prison.

*"And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, **for he has visited and redeemed his people**" (Luke 1:67-68 [ESV](#))*

Z rejoices that God is sending a Redeemer who will redeem His people.

The word “redeemed” can refer to the release of a prison or the freeing of a slave. **Our world tries to convince us that we are already free.** Our world teaches us that we have the power in ourselves to define our own lives and to chart our own destinies. We are autonomous. We can make our lives the best version of ourselves possible.

Yet if we slow down inside and look, we see chains upon our souls. Inside we will discover guilt and shame. Inside we will discover fears and hatred. Inside we will discover discontent and turmoil. Inside we discover darkness.

If we are already free, why do we feel so isolated and alone?

If we are free, why do keep living in ways that destroy our very lives?

If we are free, why are we so afraid of what lies ahead?

If we are free, why do we feel so guilty and ashamed?

God in His Word tells us what we truly are:

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.’”
(John 8:34 [ESV](#))

When we are born into this world, we are born enslaved . . . imprisoned by our own selfishness, pride, lusts and lies. What can be done for an imprisoned soul?

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”
(Galatians 4:4–5 [ESV](#))

Only Jesus possesses the ability to pay the purchase price for our sins. He alone can liberate us and make us free to be who God created us to be. If you are without Jesus, you are a slave. **If you possess Jesus, you are a child of God with full privileges in His family.**

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36 [ESV](#))

Are you free? Has the Son set you free?

Accomplishment #1: Jesus visits us with comfort.

Accomplishment #2: Jesus releases us from prison.

Accomplishment #3: Jesus defeats our enemies.

*“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and **has raised up a horn of salvation for us** in the house of his servant David,” (Luke 1:68–69 [ESV](#))*

In the Bible, a “horn” often symbolizes great power and strength. Think of some animals who have “horns”: rhinoceros, moose, Cape buffalo. These animals use their horns in both defense and attack. They drive out any living thing that threatens their little ones. If you hiking in the wild and you come across one of these horned animals, you would be wise to avoid confrontation. These are powerful animals that use their horns to kill.

The Lord has raised up a HORN of salvation. The name of this Horn is Jesus. The Christmas story often brings up the image of Jesus as a meek, mild and approachable Savior. AND He is!! **BUT He is also strong, powerful and terrifying.**

Jesus is gentle with those who come to Him humbly and in need. A bruised reed He does not break. We take comfort in that. **BUT we also take comfort that Jesus is a HORN of salvation. He is strong enough and willing to destroy all enemies of God who threaten to harm our souls.** How safe we are when we are in Him! Z. leans into this truth of the Messiah who is to be born.

*as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 **that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us**; . . . 74 that we, **being delivered from the hand of our enemies**, might serve him **without fear**,” (Luke 1:70–74 [ESV](#))*

Evil is real. Evil is real in this physical realm. Evil is real in the social realm. Evil is real in the spiritual realm. Evil is more powerful and crafty than any of us.

If we were to rely on our own strength, evil would overrun us. **When we realize we are being attacked by someone filled with malice and power, we are right to seek out someone who can help us!**

Friends, do you know that Satan works every day to destroy you . . . to tear you away from the life God gives . . . to rob you of every good thing . . . to keep you from eternal joy . . . to take you down to darkness of despair with him? Friend, do you know that you are no match for Satan? **Do you feel his power and his strength pressing against you? If you do know these things, you sing with Z!!**

*“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he . . . **has raised up a horn of salvation for us!!** (1:68-69)*

Jesus stands against Satan and crushes the head of the Devourer. The eternal Son of God takes the form of a baby for the very purpose of defeating Satan for us.

Why do you think little boys love the story of superheroes? I think it is because they can identify with the real problem of bad guys in this world who are stronger than they are. What joy when the superhero flies in to save the day! **Jesus is the ultimate superhero.** By His power He defeats every enemy. And one day He will defeat them in a final fashion. **One day no more enemies will be standing. They all will have been placed in judgment forever.**

It is healthy to our soul to meditate much on the DEVASTATING POWER of our great God to crush His enemies. If we are His children, then God's enemies are ours too. Jesus is the most gentle of Beings. But He is also the most terrifying.

I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”(Psalm 18:1–2 [ESV](#))

Accomplishment #1: Jesus visits us with comfort.

Accomplishment #2: Jesus releases us from prison.

Accomplishment #3: Jesus defeats our enemies.

Accomplishment #4: Jesus cancels our debt.

*“[Luke 1:76](#) And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, **77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God,**” ([Luke 1:76–78 \[ESV\]\(#\)](#))*

If our debt were only measured in dollars, this cancellation of it would be cause for great praise. Yet our debt is not monetary, it is spiritual. **Ours is not the debt of a borrower against a lender, but the debt of a criminal against the Law.** We have sinned against God and the Law requires a just payment.

Illustration: Nazi secretary

A couple of years ago, a 97-year-old former secretary at a Nazi concentration camp was found guilty of complicity in the murder of more than 10,000 people imprisoned there, and handed a two-year suspended sentence. Irmgard Furchner, worked at the Stutthof camp between 1943 and 1945 as a secretary to

the camp commandant, when she was 18 and 19. Her crime took place 70 years ago. Yet now the law still chased her down and condemned her.

How much time is required for sin's guilt to fade away? How much time before the Law stops speaking a word of condemnation to the guilty? The Law stops chasing us ONLY after the sin is fully paid.

What can wash away my sins? Can the passing of time? No. Not all eternity is enough time for our sins to fade. Can our own confessions? No. Our confessions only confirm our guilt. Can we make amends? No. Irmgard likely lived a kind and moral life for 70 years. Yet her good works could not free her from the guilt of her sins. What can wash away my sins? Answer: Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Are you forgiven? Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb? Jesus takes off our robes of filthy sin and clothes us with His very righteousness! This is His promise to us!!

Accomplishment #1: Jesus visits us with comfort.

Accomplishment #2: Jesus releases us from prison.

Accomplishment #3: Jesus defeats our enemies.

Accomplishment #4: Jesus cancels our debt.

Accomplishment #5: Jesus shines light into our lives.

"78 whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:78–79 [ESV](#))

Most mornings I rise earlier than Kimberly and in the winter it is very dark. No lights to guide my steps. I try really hard not to wake Kimberly and so I try not to turn on any lights until after I have left the bedroom. This means that I must stumble about to find my slippers, to find a warm sweatshirt, to make my way out of the bedroom without jamming my toes into the bed. **How comforting it is to finally close the door and turn on a light where I can see my surroundings.**

God tells us that without Him, our whole life is one of spiritual darkness.

We stumble about trying to find a way home.

We cannot see to know what is righteous and what is wicked.

We fall into pits of despair.

We live in a place where evil beings dwell and seek to devour us.
It is a terrible thing to dwell in darkness. Death itself is there.

We do not have to think long about our world to perceive darkness. Man is nowhere content with his experience. Man seeks for a better world because the present world is so unsatisfying. The story of mankind is the story of search for something better. A freedom from the worries, the harshness, the brutality, the insecurity. Man is convinced there is an answer to his problems and so he searches . . . he searches with his mind, he searches with his emotions, he searches with human government. For all the searching, is man on his own closer to the city of light? Are the efforts of man bringing us closer to hope, to peace, to goodness? Only a foolish person would say that we are closer now than 2000 years ago.

Why did Jesus come into this world? To give light to every man!! Without Him, there is NO LIGHT.

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."" (John 8:12 [ESV](#))

What joy! Main Idea: All the hopes of all humanity are met in Jesus. When Jesus arrives, we have reason to jump with joy and to worship Him.

Conclusion

Have you personally experienced these five accomplishments secured for you by Jesus? Believe. If you have experienced them, let us worship the LORD in the good news of the Messiah who has come to us. With Z., let us say,,

*"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel!"
 For now we have relief in our troubles,
 now we have been set free from our chains,
 now the enemy that threatens us is defeated,
 now our infinite debt has been cancelled
 and now we walk in the LIGHT as He is in the Light!
 Blessed be the LORD God of Israel!"*