

# Sunday December 19, 2021

## Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

### Welcome & Prayer (John H)

This is the fourth and last week of what's known as Advent, which is the season where we prepare for Christmas, to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. But Advent wasn't always a time of preparation for Christmas in the Church. In the 4th and 5th centuries it was a time for newly converted Christians to prepare for their baptism which would happen at the feast of Epiphany in January. Then in the 6th century it became about preparing Christians for the second coming of Jesus. It wasn't until the Middle Ages that it became about preparing for Christmas. So we could say that historically Advent is not just about us being prepared for Christmas but about us being prepared for Christ. Preparing for Christ coming to us as a baby at Christmas, preparing for Christ coming to us as our Saviour at our conversion, preparing for Christ coming to us as our Lord every day of our earthly lives & then for our eternal lives when he comes again.

As we pray let us reflect on being prepared for Jesus Christ to be in our lives at Christmas & every other day of our lives as well. The prayer is adapted from a prayer poem by Renee Swope called "The Manger of my Heart"

*Lord God, Heavenly Father,  
Restore to me the wonder, that came with Jesus' birth,  
When He left the riches of Heaven and was wrapped in rags of earth.  
Immanuel, God with us, Your presence came that night.  
And angels announced, & Into the darkness, God brings His Light.  
Do not be afraid, & they said, to shepherds in the field.  
Speak to my heart today, Lord, and help me to yield.  
Make me like those shepherds, obedient to Your call.  
Setting distractions and worries aside, to You I surrender all.  
Surround me with Your presence, Lord, I long to hear Your voice.  
Clear my mind of countless concerns and all the busy noise.  
Slow me down this Christmas, let me not be in a rush.  
In the midst of parties and planning, I want to feel your hush.  
This Christmas, Jesus, come to the manger of my heart.  
Invade my soul like Bethlehem, bring peace to every part.  
Dwell within and around me, as I unwrap Your presence each day.  
Keep me close to You, Lord. In Your wonderful Name I pray. Amen.*

## Song – Hark the Herald Angels Sing

[Hark, the Herald Angels Sing \(Christmas Lyric Video\)](#) — [Emu Music.mp4 - Google Drive](#)

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| <p>1. Hark! The herald angels sing<br/>"Glory to the newborn King"<br/>Peace on earth and mercy mild<br/>God and sinners reconciled<br/>Joyful all ye nations rise<br/>Join the triumph of the skies<br/>With angelic host proclaim<br/>Christ is born in Bethlehem<br/>Hark! The herald angels sing<br/>"Glory to the newborn King"</p> | <p>2. Christ, the highest heaven adore<br/>Christ, the everlasting Lord<br/>Late in time behold Him come<br/>Offspring of a virgin's womb<br/>Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;<br/>Hail the incarnate Deity<br/>Pleased as man with man to dwell<br/>Jesus our Emmanuel<br/>Hark the herald angel's sing<br/>Glory to the new born King.</p> |
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2. Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness  
Light and life to all He brings  
Risen with healing in His wings  
Mild He lays His glory by  
Born that man no more may die  
Born to raise the sons of earth  
Born to give them second birth  
Hark the Herald angles sing  
Glory to the new born King.

## Bible Reading – Luke 1:1-25 (NIV)

*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled<sup>[a]</sup> among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.*

*<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. <sup>5</sup> In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. <sup>6</sup> Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. <sup>7</sup> But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.*

*<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.*

*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. <sup>14</sup> He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. <sup>16</sup> He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."*

*<sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent & not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." <sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. <sup>22</sup> When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak. <sup>23</sup> When his time of service was completed, he returned home. <sup>24</sup> After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. <sup>25</sup> "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favour & taken away my disgrace among the people."*

## Announcements – Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> December

**School Holidays.** Our school children are on holidays this week so that means the normal activities of the church will close down for the Summer School Holidays and will only start back after Australia Day 2022. There will be a basic Kids Church that will run each Sunday over that time. Over the summer we do hope that you are able to have a break from all your Church activities. Please come each Sunday but doing the

week we hope you take a well earned break from everything else. Many thanks to those who have given of themselves this year to make the ministries of the church run so well.

**Pandemic Prayers.** As a gift for every regular attender of the church, we have published a book called **Prayers from our People during the Pandemic.** This is a collection of prayers that we sent around during 2020-21 as apart of our paper and interactive services. Please find the copy with your name on it and use it as an encouragement to pray. Merry Christmas!

**Pledges.** Many thanks to all those who have pledged money for our Ministry Facilities Fund. When you come to pay your pledges please can you mark the transfer or the envelope 'Building'

**Focus for the month – Christmas.** This Christmas, what can we do to spread the good news of our Saviour birth (and death and resurrection) to those around us? Could we pray for someone? Could we invite them to join us for Christmas Day? Could we invite them to Church? Could we give them a Christian book? Could we post someone on Facebook/Instagram? Could we offer to read the bible with them in the new year? At this time of year some people (not all of course) are open to Christian things. But are we open to sharing Christian things with them?

**ZOOM Prayer time.** Every Monday night the Church meets via ZOOM to pray. It is so important that pray, both individually and collectively for each other, our church and our nation at this time.

**Christmas Services** will be held at

Christmas Eve 6pm (Charlestown),

Christmas Day 8am (Swansea) and 9:30am Charlestown).

Please use the opportunity to invite friends and family to come along.

## Song – O Little Town of Bethlehem

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| <p>1. O little town of Bethlehem,<br/>How still we see thee lie.<br/>Above thy deep and dreamless sleep<br/>The silent stars go by;<br/>Yet in thy dark streets shineth<br/>The everlasting Light.<br/>The hopes and fears of all the years<br/>met in thee tonight.</p>      | <p>3. How silently, how silently<br/>The wondrous gift is giv'n!<br/>So God imparts to human hearts<br/>The blessings of his heav'n.<br/>No ear may hear his coming;<br/>But in this world of sin,<br/>Where meek souls will receive him, still<br/>The dear Christ enters in.</p> |
| <p>2. For Christ is born of Mary,<br/>And, gathered all above<br/>While mortals sleep, the angels keep<br/>Their watch of wond'ring love.<br/>O morning stars, together<br/>Proclaim the holy birth,<br/>And praises sing to God the King,<br/>And peace to men on earth.</p> |  |

## Bible Reading – Luke 1:26-56

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." <sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a

virgin?"<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."<sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.<sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail."<sup>38</sup> "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,<sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.<sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"<sup>43</sup> But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.<sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.<sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."<sup>56</sup> Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

## Pastoral Prayer (Simon Mulready)

Heavenly Father, We thank you we can come to you in prayer in full assurance of your love for us. That you love us, in spite of our sin. That you loved us before the world was made. That you loved us, by sending your son to earth, born in a manger, God come as man, to bear our sins. Thank you that you allow us to speak to you in prayer. The Lord of creation, who flung the stars into space, who commands the rain and the wind, who sustains all of creation, delight for us to draw near to you in prayer.

Father, we pray that our nation, Australia. So consumed by material possessions, a country of great wealth and prosperity, yet so lost, and without knowledge of you. We pray for the work of your Spirit, to soften the hearts that are hard and draw people to Jesus. We pray that the gospel message would be proclaimed by your church and by your people, for the glory of our saviour and King.

We pray particularly for the Presbyterian church at Wee Waa. Thank you for their faithful gospel ministry in the local community. We pray that they would be able to connect with others in the lead up to Christmas and bring light and hope to those who are lost. We pray for comfort and peace for those who have been affected by recent floods, and for recovery for farmers whose properties have been impacted. Father, here in Charlestown, we pray that you would use us in connecting with our own community. Grant to us, hearts of compassion, and feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace. May we have good conversations about the birth of Jesus. We also pray for those in our community for whom Christmas is a difficult time. For those who are lonely, for those who have lost loved ones, for those who are suffering – we ask for your peace, we ask for your kindness. Help us to be generous to those in need.

Father we also pray, that your word, the sword of the Spirit, would be active in our own lives. Help us to listen well at church, and to speak to each other after church, of the challenges and encouragement we receive from scripture. Help us to be disciplined in reading the Bible at home during the week. May we set aside time to read and pray every day. Give us energy when we are too tired. Convict us, when we are too lazy. May your word to us, be sweet, like honey. May we look for it, like silver. May we search for it, like treasure. We pray that the mum and dads in our church will find time to read the Bible with their families.

We pray that our pastors, Steve and Jon, will humble themselves before your word, and be taught by it, as they teach us.

And we continue to pray for the impact of COVID 19 here in Australia and around the world. We pray for good medical care and recovery for those who are suffering from the virus. We pray for equitable access to vaccines for 3rd world countries. We pray for wisdom for rulers and governments in their decision making.

We pray that the global church would trust in your sovereign hand, and know the words of the prophet Habakkuk, *"Though the fig tree does not blossom and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour."* In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen

## Carol – How still the starry night

[How Still The Starry Night // Emu Music - YouTube](#)

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| <p>1. How still the starry night above<br/>How still the earth below<br/>How small the greatest gift of love<br/>The world has ever known<br/>The fullness of the deity<br/>A borrowed manger fills<br/>The God of all eternity<br/>Beneath the Bethl'hem hills</p>                  | <p>3. How still the heart today that bows<br/>Before our Prince of Peace<br/>What joy to lay our burdens down<br/>Each one at Jesus' feet!<br/>So let us all adore Him<br/>And gladly do His will<br/>Receive the Christ who came to us<br/>How quietly, how still</p> |
| <p>2. How still He lies in Mary's arms<br/>The long-expected Christ<br/>His voice the raging sea will calm<br/>The dead He'll raise to life!<br/>A ring of thorns will crown Him<br/>Our suff'ring Servant King<br/>The Saviour of the world is born<br/>To save us from our sin</p> |  |

## Bible Reading – Luke 1:57-80 (NIV)

<sup>57</sup> When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. <sup>58</sup> Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. <sup>59</sup> On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, <sup>60</sup> but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." <sup>61</sup> They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." <sup>62</sup> Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. <sup>63</sup> He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." <sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup> All the neighbours were filled with awe & throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

<sup>67</sup> His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: <sup>68</sup> "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. <sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David <sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), <sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— <sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath he swore to our father Abraham: <sup>74</sup> to rescue us from the hand of our

enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear <sup>75</sup> in holiness & righteousness before him all our days. <sup>76</sup> And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, <sup>77</sup> to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven <sup>79</sup> to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." <sup>80</sup> And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

## Sermon: It's not about YOU (Stephen T) <https://youtu.be/StytvWDqDH0>

Its not about YOU. They are the famous first words in Rick Warren's book "The Purpose Driven Life." Its not about you. And they are words we need to remember when we come this year to Christmas. Because it seems everyone else does want to make it about you.

Slide 2

You see after almost 2 years of COVID, border restrictions, social distancing this Christmas time is being marketed as all about YOU. Get away on the holiday you deserve. Buy something special to make up for all the tough times you have gone through. Enjoy your family this year. Organise a big feed. Spare no excuse. This Christmas make sure it is all about you. Christmas has become Memas.

Well, our passage this morning will help us take our eyes off ourselves and onto the one who truly deserves our thoughts, our attention, our worship this Christmas. And it all starts with John the Baptist's parents

Slide 3

### 1. Elizabeth and Zechariah. (verses 57-66)

<sup>57</sup> "When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son." <sup>58</sup> Her neighbours & relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy".

When a new life comes into the world it is all about the kid isn't it? It's not about the mum who has carried the child for the last 9 months and laboured to give birth. Or about the dad who has started the whole thing off. Or about the nurses or doctors who ensure a safe delivery. It's all about the child. And this child has brought his aged parents Elizabeth and Zechariah great joy. It is a miracle. One promised by God back earlier in the chapter. Now what they truly wanted has been signed, sealed and delivered.

And in Jewish households on the 8<sup>th</sup> day that boy would be circumcised. And so, all the family, all the community in fact, would gather together for this great occasion and normally at this time the father would name his child after himself. So, everyone was expecting this child to be called Zechariah junior. But he isn't. Elizabeth instead says his name will be John.

John, what an outrageous name! There are no relatives in the family named John. Elizabeth must be out of her mind to name him John! Now personally I don't find John particularly outrageous, my dad's name is John, my middle name is John, Joshua's middle name is John. John is a good name. Personally, I find the names of some of our modern celebrities outrageous – names like Cosmo. X-Ash-A-12, Apple, Blue Angel, Cricket, Jermajesty!

Slide 4

So, what are the relatives to do? <sup>62</sup> "Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. <sup>63</sup> He asked for a writing tablet, & to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." <sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free & he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup> All the neighbours were filled with awe, & throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things."

Zechariah hasn't been able to speak for 9 months, ever since he doubted the angel Gabriel's message that he and Elizabeth were going to have a son in their old age. But now when he opens his mouth and words

actually come out, Zechariah has learnt his lesson. "His name is John." This time Zechariah will believe and obey what God is saying to him. Yes, God has been gracious to him and that is what the name John means; exactly that, God is gracious.

Slide 5

And then once his speech is back it is like Zechariah's heart explodes with pent up joy. His first words are not about sport or money but a song of praise to his great, great God. God is doing something incredible here. After 400 years of silence, 400 years of apparent absence, God is visiting this small village in the back blocks of Judea. You see what has happened to Zechariah is a picture of what has happened to God's people. When they doubted, God became silent but now God is opening up the channel of communication once again. So, the question is will they respond in praise & worship or will they continue their doubt & silence? No this is not a story all about Elizabeth and Zechariah. So maybe then it is about their son

Slide 6

## 2. John (verses 76-80)

For notice the contents of Zechariah's song. <sup>76</sup> "And you, **my child**, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, <sup>77</sup> to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven <sup>79</sup> to shine on those living in darkness & in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

God will do something through John, for John will be God's prophet. Now a prophet has two main roles. To be a foreteller and a forthteller. He is a foreteller in that he often predicts what is going to happen into the future. God only knows the future & so sometimes he lets his prophets in on the secret so that he can tell others to get ready for future events. But the prophet is also a forthteller. He or she tells forth clearly what God is doing right now.

And John is going to prepare the way for God Himself to come amongst his people. John will help God's people to repent and believe for that is how they will be saved. John will talk about forgiveness of sins, God's tender mercy and how God is going to reveal himself again to his people and shed light to those who had been living in darkness for far too long.

For "the rising sun will come to us from heaven." God is going to come and live amongst his people. And Zechariah's son, John the Baptist is going to be the one to point God's people in the right direction. He will be the signpost that will tell us where to look & what exactly to look for. Someone who will forgive us our sins, who will show us God's mercy. Someone who will illuminate our current darkness and give life in the midst of the shadow of death.

So, it really wasn't about Zechariah or Elizabeth. And here we see it isn't really about John the Baptist either. He is only the one preparing the way for the Lord. John is not the lead guitar; he is the one playing the second fiddle. He is not the lead singer he is just one of many of God's prophets who are happy to be a part of the chorus.

Slide 7

So, when he starts his public ministry, he continually points to the one who is to come. In John 1:27 he says "There is one who comes after whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." In John 1:30 he states, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." And almost as a summary of his whole ministry he declares in John 3:10 "He must become greater, I must become less." So, if it is not about John, if it is not about Zechariah and Elizabeth, who is this passage all about? It's all about Jesus.

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## 3. Jesus (verses 67-73)

"His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit & prophesied: <sup>68</sup> "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because **he has come** to his people and redeemed them. <sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for



*us in the house of his servant David* <sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), <sup>71</sup> *salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us*

God has come to his people. God has raised up a horn of salvation. God has saved us from our enemies. It is all in the past tense. It is all things that have happened already. But wait a second Jesus has not even been born yet. God is yet to step foot on this planet in the form of his son Jesus. Salvation would not come until some 30 odd year later when Jesus dies on the cross. His enemies would not get what they deserve until he comes again at least 2000 years after Zechariah says these words.

Yes, but the plan has been set in train. The first steps had been taken. And so, Zechariah is so sure that the one who starts this work can finish it, he talks about it having been completed even though it has only just begun. But what is the work that God has started? Well, it is so big, so huge, so massive that no one explanation or description is big enough to tell the whole story. So, Zechariah's song talks about redemption, salvation, fulfilment, forgiveness, light. Drawing deep from the language of the Old Testament he paints a picture of a multifaceted gospel message.

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Multifaceted. Now I don't know too much about diamonds but I believe this diamond, the Brilliant 10, is an incredible example of craftsmanship. It has multi facets, 71 faces in all. Each facet is shaped in a precise and calculated technique to reveal a perfect 10 arrow star when viewed from above and when viewed from below you see a perfect 10 heart pattern. Quite simply which every way you look at it, this is an impressive piece of jewelry.

Slide 10

In the same way, what God has done for us is so impressive that you have to look at it in several ways and with several angles to understand its incredible beauty. So, in verse 68 Zechariah praises God for the way that he has **redeemed his people**.

Redemption. What does that mean that God has redeemed his people? Well the idea comes from the slave market. In those days of slaves, you could go along & pay cash to own your own slave. That slave was in bondage to someone else but when you handed over the cash, they became yours. The picture of redemption then is that we all are slaves, slaves to sin, slaves to Satan & that means we are in bondage to him, we have to do what he tells us to.

But when Jesus comes, he buys us. He frees us. He makes us his own. And the price he pays is his own life. He takes our place. He endures our punishment. So that we are no longer under the slavery of sin and Satan but now become the Saviours. How amazing is that?

Slide 11

But that is only one facet to Jesus' work. Not only did he redeem us, **he saved us**. <sup>69</sup> *He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ...* <sup>71</sup> *salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.* The horn of salvation is a show of strength. The horn of the ox, the bull, the ram is a powerful weapon to protect them from danger. Yet God has access to a more powerful horn, he has the power to save us from all our enemies.

In the OT God rescued his people from the Egyptians through the Red Sea. He rescued them from the Canaanites and brought them into the promised land. He rescued them from the Babylonians and brought them back out of captivity. But his ultimate rescue story is when he rescues us from Satan. He doesn't just pay for the price of our redemption; he smashes Satan power with his wonderful salvation. He defeats him. He goes to Satan's home ground so to speak, to death and hell and wins a victory for all who would trust in him.



I love the story about the citizens of Feldkirch, Austria. They didn't know what to do. Napoleon's massive army was preparing to attack. Soldiers had been spotted on the heights above the little town, which was situated on the Austrian border. A council of citizens was hastily summoned to decide whether they should try to defend themselves or display the white flag of surrender. It happened to be Easter Sunday, and the people had gathered in the local church. The preacher rose and said, "Friends, we have been counting on our own strength, and apparently that has failed us. As this is the day of our Lord's resurrection, let us just ring the bells, have our services as usual, and leave the matter in His hands. We know only our weakness, and not the power of God to defend us." The council accepted his plan and the church bells rang. The enemy, hearing the sudden peal of bells, concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night to defend the town. Before the service ended, the enemy broke camp and left. The power of God had defeated their enemies.

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Redemption. Salvation. Fulfilment. <sup>69</sup>*"He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David"* <sup>70</sup>*(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago).*" Right at the centre of this song is a reminder of God's promised faithfulness to his people. He said he would save them. He said they could trust him. He said he would come. God had made his people promises, covenants, agreements where he would be their God and they would be his people. And even if they weren't willing to keep their side of the bargain God would always be faithful. God always keeps his promises.

Friends what is happening in the New Testament is just an extension what God has promised in the Old Testament. God's word can be trusted. God's promises will be fulfilled. So as Zechariah looks forward to what will happen through Jesus another facet of this good news is God's foreknowledge of everything. He sent prophets. He sent Kings. God sent men and women of faith and they all point to what God is doing in the world through Jesus.

Slide 13

And what is God doing? Redeeming his people. Saving his people. Forgiving his people. *"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,"* <sup>77</sup>*to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins"* We were in trouble, Big trouble. God cannot look upon sin. He can't stand it. He can't be anywhere near it.

And yet you and I are filled with sin. Ever since birth we were chock a block filled with wrongdoing, evil, pride, lying, selfishness, sin. But now God has removed our sins as far as east is from west. God has forgiven our sins. I can now stand before God not in my own righteousness but in Jesus' righteousness. Which means there is now nothing separating me from the love of God. Nothing.

Slide 14

And yet there is time for one more facet to of the good news according to Zechariah's song. Light has now come. *"Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven"* <sup>79</sup>*to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."*

Without God, men and women are in a bleak state. They live in darkness and under the shadow of death. Trapped in the prison of self interest they experience ignorance, injustice, death and destruction. But with Jesus the rising sun from heaven can shine on them. Giving them light, life and peace. For those who turn to Jesus it is like the dawning of a new day. What a wonderful picture of new life.

Friends each of these pictures gives us a facet of the gospel of Jesus. A new day. Forgiveness of sins. Faithfulness to God's promises. Saved from our enemies. Redeemed and bought back. But the good news is even more spectacular than that. There are even more facets not mentioned by Zechariah.

Jesus on the cross drinks the cup of God's wrath so that we might escape his judgement. Christ slays the dragon of Satan as he delivers a head crushing blow to our biggest enemy. Christ is the lamb of God whose

sacrifice takes away our sin and shame. Christ liberates us from the oppression of one who conquered our lives. Christ is the suffering servant who joins us in our pain and delivers us from despair. Christ's blood is shed to remove us from God's wrath. Christ is the example of discipleship in that he takes up his cross to do what God calls him to do. And yet even still there is more.

Each of these images, each of these pictures takes us to the heart of God. Each of them is like a star guiding us on our journey to our heavenly home. All brilliant by themselves but when brought together they are absolutely stunning. And here Zechariah piles picture upon picture as he speaks primarily not about his son John but about the coming of God's Son Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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That is Zechariah's focus and that should be our focus, not just at Christmas but all time. For the whole of the Bible has its focus on Jesus. And all the promises of God have their focus on Jesus. And the whole history of the world has its focus on Jesus. Life itself is all about Jesus. And God wants you and me to focus on Him as well. He is the one that we truly need. Not really a holiday, not really freedom, not really family and presents. What we need is Jesus. Which is why our passage moves from Jesus to

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#### 4. Us (verses 74-75, 78-79)

*"God has raised up a horn of salvation for us ... to rescue us from the hand of our enemies & to enable us to serve him without fear"<sup>75</sup> in holiness & righteousness before him all our days.*

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Christ's coming is for people like us. Christ has come to rescue us. On Anzac Day 2006, the mine at Beaconsfield collapsed killing one miner and trapping two others thousands of feet below the surface. Days turned into weeks as miners bore through tons of rock; inching closer and closer. Fourteen days after the accident, over 300 hours of waiting for rescue, the two miners were freed. Bill Shorten, then national secretary of the Australian Workers Union, said, "This is the biggest escape from the biggest prison." Sorry Bill.

Our rescue from death and sin and Satan is an even bigger rescue story from an even worse prison. And so, we need to grab hold of our rescuer. Admit that we could never get out of there by ourselves. And trust that Jesus' death and resurrection rescues us completely.

Slide 18

But for us it doesn't end there. *"God has raised up a horn of salvation for us ... to rescue us from the hand of our enemies & to enable us to serve him without fear"* We have been rescued for a purpose. Not to sit back and enjoy our salvation knowing that one day we will see our rescuer face to face in heaven. We now live to serve Jesus. Our life is no longer our own, it is his. He bought it at a price. And so out of gratitude & thankfulness we no longer serve ourselves and our own desires we serve Him. We make him our boss.

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Christmas enables us to focus on Jesus so that we can get our own lives in perspective. As JC Ryle says in his *Meditations on The Gospel of Luke* *"Now let us end the chapter by examining what we know of these glorious privileges. Do we know anything of pardon, of forgiveness? Have we turned from darkness to light? Have we tasted peace with God? These, after all, are the realities of Christianity... Let us never rest until we are experientially acquainted with all of them. Mercy and grace have provided them. Mercy and grace will give them to all who call on Christ's name. Let us never rest until the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that our sins are forgiven us; that we have passed from darkness to light; and that we are actually walking in the narrow way, the way of peace."* You see life is not about us, it is really about

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#### 5. The Lord.

Verse 58 **"The Lord** was the one who showed Elizabeth and Zechariah great mercy."

Verse 66 **"It was the Lord's hand** that was with him."

Verse 68 **"it is the Lord** who has come to his people and redeemed them."

Verse 69 "**He** has raised up a horn of salvation." He is the one who is sending us salvation, prepared by John the Baptist & won by His Son Jesus

Slide 21

Joy to the world, the Lord has come. That is God's plan. Jesus is the one who provides it for us. John is the one who points us to Him. And Elizabeth and Zechariah are the ones who praise God for it. So, friends, Christmas is not about you. It is about what the Lord is doing through his son, Jesus Christ.

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So how can we show the world this year that Christmas is not about us but about Jesus? We can do that by the way we sing praises to the Lord. How we worship Jesus. We can do that by giving thanks to Jesus for all that He has given us. We can do that by not looking to food or family or presents as being the main game this Christmas time. By not taking a holiday from God but using our holidays to know Him better. We can do it through the words we say on our Christmas cards, the gifts we give to the ones we love, the topics we talk about when we get together. And by the joy we radiant out when we meet up with others over this special time. We do it by becoming a conduit of the gospel of Jesus to those around us.

It's not about you. It's not about me. It's all about Jesus & the salvation he gives to his people

## Song – Once in Royal David's city

[once in royal davids city - YouTube](#)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Once in royal David's city<br/>           Stood a lowly cattle shed<br/>           There a mother laid her baby<br/>           In a manger for His bed<br/>           Mary was that mother mild<br/>           Jesus Christ her little child</p>                        | <p>3. And our eyes at last shall see Him<br/>           Through His own redeeming love<br/>           For that child, so dear and gentle<br/>           Is our Lord in heaven above<br/>           And He leads His children along<br/>           To the place where He is gone</p> |
| <p>2. He came down to earth from heaven<br/>           Who is God and Lord of all<br/>           And His shelter was a stable<br/>           And His cradle was a stall<br/>           With the poor, oppressed and wholly<br/>           Lived on earth our Saviour holy</p> |   |

## Closing.

Mary sang, "My soul magnifies the Lord" or "My soul glorifies the Lord." As we go from here today, as we celebrate Christmas, let us remember in all things to glorify God, to make our lives a testimony to his love and grace and peace. Amen

**Morning Tea** Why not give someone a call and have a cuppa together?