

# B.A.S.I.C.

*Brothers And Sisters In Christ*

## Canticles of the Christ-Child

### Zacharias' Benedictus: Luke 1:67-79

By Pastor David Ude

**Luke 1:67-79** And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, **68** "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people **69** and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, **70** 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; **72** to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, **73** the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us **74** that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, **75** in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. **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, 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."

*Zechariah  
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Zechariah beams, bursting with pride. He's an old man and His wife an old lady but she has just given birth to their first child. It is the day of his circumcision, the act by which God seals to his people the covenant he made with Abraham their Father. All their friends and relatives have gathered to celebrate. So it is natural that Zechariah should be so proud, so filled with joy. But it is not pride in his son. Rather he bursts forth in a song to boast in His God.

Zechariah hasn't spoken a single word in about 9 months ever since that day in the temple. While Zechariah offered up the sacrifice and prayer of God's people, Gabriel who "stands in the presence of God" came and stood in the presence of Zechariah. What an awesome thing!

Zechariah is standing in the presence of one who has seen the face of the most high! Yet, though afraid, Zechariah is not

properly humbled by this. He doubted the promise the angel brought him from the Lord. He said, “how can this be?” “I can’t have a child, I’m too old. My wife is too old! Besides we’ve never been able to have children!” “Can’t! Can’t! Can’t! Is all Zechariah can find to say to the messenger of the God who always can!

Zechariah disbelieves despite the awesome circumstance and despite the fact that this is the answer to his prayer. Zechariah is at this point standing in the temple which itself was built to picture the Christ-child! Zechariah has every reason to believe, and yet he can’t find anything to say except “How can this be?” This is not to say Zechariah is an unbeliever, far from it. But he has had a lapse. In that moment he was proud, lifting himself up above the Word of God and putting himself in the position of determining whether or not what God says could be what God means. For this reason Zechariah’s mouth is shut for 9 months so that through silence he might learn the proper awe for God’s Word and the proper way to use His own - to brag. A lesson which he learns well. When at last the Spirit opens his mouth, he bursts forth in a song of boasting in God.

**“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. For He has visited and redeemed His people!”**

You know that pride you feel when you hear of someone doing something great from your country? Or even from your state, or town? An olympic athlete. A war hero. A Nobel prize winner. There is a deep sense of nationalistic pride in Zechariah’s words here - this is Israel’s God! And look what He has done for His peo-

ple! Verse 69 - “the house of David”, verse 72 - “the mercy promised to our Fathers”, verse 73 - “the oath he swore to Abraham our father.” Yet this is not an arrogant nationalism that looks down on others. For when Zechariah talks about “Israel” and “Abraham” he surely knows that it is the children of faith who are the children of Abraham and as Simeon will later say of Jesus, **“A light for revelation to the gentiles and the glory of your people israel.”** In fact, in verse 79 when Zechariah sings **“to give light to those who sit in darkness”** he is quoting from Isaiah 9:1-2, **“But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.”**

Zechariah is proud of what the God of Israel has promised and performed for Jew and Gentile alike. He is proud to be a part of the people from whom the Christ will come, and he should be! He is proud of his country’s history, not because of the great deeds of his forefathers, but because of the great deeds of mercy promised to and done for them! Zechariah’s language is steeped in Old Testament imagery covering the length and breadth and width and height of all the wonderful works of God. For instance verse 68 - **“He has visited and redeemed”** - those are Exodus words. For God came down, visited His people in their distress in Egypt and redeemed them from the hand of

*Zechariah is at this point standing in the temple which itself was built to picture the Christ-child!*

*because of my  
steadfast love for  
David*

Pharaoh by the blood of Passover lambs and the first born sons of Egypt. But now even greater He has made redemption for His people by the blood of His Son.

The Proud father continues in verse 69 - "**He has raised up a horn for us in the house of his servant David.**" By "horn" Zechariah means pride, strength, glory. The house of David was a great source of pride to the people of Israel. He had been their great King and that one of his descendants should rule over them was their dearest hope.

While reading through the books of Chronicles and Kings you often find phrases such as this describing the kings of David's line: "He walked in the ways of his father David" or "He did not walk in the ways of his Father David." Or that God was merciful to so and so "because of my steadfast love for David." See God had made a promise to David that His Son would reign over His throne forever. And that promise was not fully realized until Jesus came, until He lived, breathed in this earth's sin-cursed air, gave himself over to that most abominable of abominations, and then rose in that most glorious of victories. There is David's greater Son, there is His eternal throne! A throne made up of wooden beams, of nails, thorns, of a tombstone rolled away. A throne of mercy where sinners come and find a King who says "Your sins are forgiven." This is Israel's pride and joy. This is Zechariah's boast!

And notice the certainty with which he speaks of all this. Verse 68 - "**He has visited and redeemed.**" Verse 69 - "**He has raised up a horn for us.**" He is speaking in the past tense. Mary is still only 6 months pregnant. Jesus hasn't even been born. But still Zecha-

riah is completely confident. That is because he knows God prophesied long ago. Verse 70 - "**As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.**" Zechariah is simply the latest in a long line of prophets who have foretold with great clarity what Christ would do. Isaiah wrote in the past tense in chapter 53 when he said "He *was bruised* for our iniquities, by his stripes *we are healed.*" For God's promise was always certain. It was the covenant he made with our fathers, it was the oath He swore to Abraham. It was the promise He made to David and the one He made to Zechariah in the temple. It will not, cannot be thwarted.

Have you ever been surrounded by people who hate you? Pastor Raju Bhitrokathi once, as a young boy, found himself surrounded by angry, barking dogs. It sounded terrifying. I can't say I've ever experienced anything like that. When Zechariah says "**To deliver us from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us**" it's easy to think of all the times the Hebrews were literally surrounded by people who hated them - the Egyptians, the Canaanites, The Assyrians, The Babylonians, the Persians, now at the time of Christ the Romans. But these are not the enemies Zechariah is referring to. There are two things which show this in the text:

First, he says "**to show mercy promised to our fathers**" but that translation isn't quite right, it doesn't say to show mercy "promised to our fathers" But to show mercy 'with our fathers.' That is what this Christ child will do, God will be showing mercy to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David themselves and not only to their

children. In other words, the mercy God promised to them was not primarily the mercy he showed them when he delivered them from earthly enemies such as the Egyptians or the Philistines, it was the mercy He would show in the person and work of the Christ-child. It was that mercy -in-the-flesh growing in the womb of the virgin!

Second, is what Zechariah says John will do. In verse 76, Zechariah's song shifts to directly address his son. Can't you imagine him looking down and smiling at him, little hands grasping daddy's finger. Here Zechariah is one proud dad. Your parents know what it's like to look down at your baby and wonder "what will you do in this world?" They know what it's like to see that baby grow, to swell with pride as they begin to see the gifts and talents God has given them. Zechariah didn't have to wonder. He didn't have to wait to see. He knew what John would do. And he was so proud. Not because John would be great but because He would go before the Lord to prepare his ways by preaching the gospel, "to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins." That is the deliverance. The forgiveness of sins. Jesus didn't come to defeat the Romans, and he never tried. He didn't come to deliver us from earthly oppressors and never claimed to. He didn't come to make sure all our laws were fair and just. He came to forgive our sins. By who He was - the sinless son of God whose blood, whose work, whose life had infinite power, like some massive global flood to wash away the sins of the world. By what He did - you are set free, delivered, ransomed from the hands of those who hate

you. And there are those who hate you. The devil hates you. Your sinful flesh hates you. And the world hates you.

But God is in the midst of His people. Because God has been born. He has been made man! He who is the Most High. Notice how highly Zechariah speaks of the Christ child. He says **"You child will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways."** The word used for "Most High" is what we call a superlative. Like "greatest" "deepest" "smartest" "most handsome." In English we rarely use superlatives as superlatives. We use them as exclamations. "This is the best lasagna I've ever!" Or as Anastasia has said about at least five different people "She's my best friend!" It's generally the same in Greek. According to one Greek grammarian, this particular word "Most High" is the only true superlative used in the New Testament and it is only ever used of God. So Zechariah is not exaggerating but truly calls Christ the superlative, the one and only Most High.

But He, like the Rising Sun, has condescended to dawn upon us! Sometimes it seems like those who are in the highest positions of authority and power in this world don't care much for the little people. But I recall a story about an exceptionally good King who used to dress up like a peasant and go to be among his people to know best how to help them. Christ, the Most High God, did not just dress up like one of us for a while, He became one of us! He stooped down to sympathize with our every weakness, to fight our enemies, to lighten our darkness. And

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giveness of their  
sins*

*The day of Christ.**The day of forgiveness.*

He did this all in mercy. "Tender mercy" as the text says. The word refers to that tender feeling you get in your gut when you have pity for someone or when you see a cute little baby. It's a feeling of compassion, of warmth, of tenderness. It is this and this alone which caused God Most High to become man most low and bear all your sins and mine.

This is why Zechariah sings "Blessed be God!" Because He has done this! It's staggering. It's wonderful. It's unbelievable! Just look, Zechariah says, behold the sunrise from on high! It rises in light and life. It shatters the darkness of sin and death. It dawns on a new day. The day our fathers looked for. The day the prophets promised. The day of Christ. The day of forgiveness. The day of freedom! A freedom in which we rejoice and serve Him!

Zechariah's pride is your pride too. He was proud that his son would be the servant to the most high God. He was proud himself to be a servant. Verses 74-75, **"That we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."**

By nature there are many things which would prevent us from serving God in eternal blessedness and joy. For one, our own ego. We, like Zechariah in the temple, tend to put ourselves above God's Word. Do you ever do that? Read it and decide whether or not to follow it and believe it based on whether or not you like it? Or do we ever want to make ourselves the highest instead of God? Or do we ever brag about ourselves and our own works, feel self satisfied with what we have done? All of this sinfulness in us keeps us from serving God as we should. So also does guilt and the darkness of death. Both of them

threaten us with eternal slavery - which we have so justly deserved. But Christ who comes to us sets us free to be children of God. He bought us with holy precious blood and innocent sufferings and death. He did this so that we would be his very own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence and blessedness! He inspires us to serve Him since He, the Most High has come down and served us in such grace and mercy!

Let us then sing with Zechariah this canticle of the Christ child. Let us glory and boast and rejoice in Him, in His love, in His forgiveness. And then, being so enamored with Him, may we serve him without fear. Without fear that our enemies will overwhelm us for Christ has already conquered them! Without fear that our sins will disqualify us from kneeling before Him for he has already forgiven us! Without fear that our service will not be good enough, because it doesn't need to be - His was! Blessed be the Lord God of Israel! For He has visited and redeemed His people. He has visited and redeemed you! Amen.