

**Introduction: “Holy, Holy, Holy” – Remembering Who God Is (Isaiah 6)**  
“Hallowed be thy name”

In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah was in the temple.

Uzziah had reigned for 52 years, but around ten years before his death, he grew proud  
and sought to burn incense before the Lord—something only the priests were to do.

When Uzziah refused to listen to the warnings of the priests,

God struck him with leprosy, and he was “excluded from the house of the Lord”

(2 Chron 26)

So, “in the year that King Uzziah died” – reminds us that  
as Uzziah goes, so goes the nation.

He died alone—unclean—excluded from the house of the Lord.

But in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah sees the Lord

And there above him stood the seraphim,

each with six wings:

two cover his face, two cover his feet, and with two he flies.

Even the seraphim cannot look directly at the glory of God.

But they call to each other,

“Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

And, predictably, when Yahweh shows up, things get shaken.

“And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called,  
and the house was filled with smoke.”

And Isaiah cries out, “Woe is me!

For I am lost;

for I am a man of unclean lips,

and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;

for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts!”

The king is dead,

and Isaiah now sees the true King, but it is not a comforting sight.

You often hear people say that in the OT, God’s glory is terrifying,  
but in Jesus, God’s glory is comforting.

That wasn’t John’s experience.

When John, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” –

the person who was closest to Jesus when our Lord was on earth –

when John sees the glorified Jesus in Revelation 1 –

“I fell at his feet as though dead.” (Rev 1:17)

The modern world wants a god without thunder – a god without wrath –  
and that is what many churches offer!

But Jesus taught us to pray,  
“Our Father who art in heaven,  
*hallowed be thy name.*”  
May your name be regarded as holy!  
as set apart – as distinct from all earthly names!

Last week, as we talked about “our Father in heaven”  
I argued that we need to be careful about “downgrading” God  
to simply another “relationship.”  
Yes, praying continually means that we need to be speaking to our heavenly Father  
throughout the day – in every situation we face! –  
but our Father’s name is holy,  
and we need to pray that his name would be regarded as holy.

Our Psalm of response echoes the “holy, holy, holy” of Isaiah 6.  
Three times the Psalmist declares “he is holy!”  
First, he declares the greatness of the name of the LORD –  
“let them praise your great and awesome name!  
Holy is he!” (v3)  
The LORD is enthroned upon the cherubim.  
Therefore the Psalmist calls us to praise the holy name of the LORD.

Second, after declaring how the King loves justice –  
and how God has established righteousness in Jacob,  
he calls us to  
“Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool!  
Holy is he!” (v5)  
The LORD does what is right – and ensures that right is done by his people.  
Therefore the Psalmist calls us to exalt the holy name of the LORD.

And third, after reminding us of the history of God’s dealings with his people,  
how God answered Moses and Aaron and Samuel –  
those who called upon the name of the LORD –  
he concludes by reminding us that God forgave them,  
and so calls us to  
“Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain;  
for the LORD our God is holy!” (v9)

And we, who are gathered in God’s holy temple –  
who have ascended the hill of the LORD through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ –  
now obey the call of the Psalmist,  
and declare the holiness of God’s name!

Sing Psalm 99  
Read Luke 1:1-25

I'll admit that I really wanted to use Mary's song for this petition –  
after all, Mary says in verse 49, “he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.”

Mary does precisely what Psalm 99 calls her to do!  
She reflects on God's mighty deeds through history,  
and she declares “holy is his name” in her song.

But, not surprisingly, Mary's song fits nicely with each of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer  
(this is true of many biblical prayers!),  
and there is some benefit of taking the opening chapters of Luke sequentially.

More importantly, the opening verses of Luke fit very well with Isaiah 6.  
Zechariah is in the temple offering incense.  
Zechariah is in the holy place where the holy name of God dwelt.

And the prayer of Zechariah is a good example of praying “hallowed be thy name.”

Now it might seem odd, at first, to pray, “Hallowed be thy name,”  
after all, God's name *is* holy – whether we say so or not!

But when we pray “hallowed be thy name,”  
we aren't just *saying* that God's name *is* holy,  
we are *praying* that God's name would be “hallowed” or *made* holy.

Our Shorter Catechism says it well,

Q. 101. *What do we pray for in the first petition? [Westminster]*

A. In the first petition, which is, “Hallowed be your name,” we pray that God would enable us and others to glorify him in all that whereby he makes himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory.

Another way of saying this is found in the Heidelberg Catechism:

**122. Q. What is the first petition? [Heidelberg]**

A. Hallowed be Thy Name. That is: Grant us first of all that we may rightly know Thee, and sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee in all Thy works, in which shine forth Thy almighty power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, and truth. Grant us also that we may so direct our whole life - our thoughts, words, and actions - that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honored and praised.

Hallowed be thy name.

To hallow is the verbal form of holy.

So it's not quite accurate to translate this as “holy be your name.”

It would be better to say, “may your name be *made* holy.”

May your name be sanctified.

After all, it's exactly the same word used to refer to *our* sanctification.

I want you to connect these two things –

God's name being sanctified,

and *you* being sanctified.

“Hallowed be thy name”

and “hallowed be thy people”!

Because of God's sanctified name,

you are a sanctified people –

because God's holy name rests upon God's holy people.

“Sanctification is the work of God's free grace

whereby we are renewed in the inner man after the image of God,

and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.” (SC 35)

In other words,

sanctification is the *hallowing* of God's people –

making us holy is making us *like* God –

as the apostle Peter will say,

God has “granted to us his precious and very great promises,

so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature,

having escaped from the corruption that is in the world

because of sinful desire.” (2 Peter 1:4)

And then Peter goes on to talk about “more and more” dying to sin and living to righteousness.

“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue,

and virtue with knowledge,

and knowledge with self-control,

and self-control with steadfastness,

and steadfastness with godliness,

and godliness with brother affection,

and brotherly affection with love.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing,

they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful

in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind,

having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.” (1:4-9)

When we pray “sanctify your name” we are praying that God

would enable us and others to glorify him in all that whereby he makes himself known;

and that he would dispose all things to his own glory.

And we see this in three ways in our text today:

First, we see Zechariah treating God's name as holy in how he approaches God in the temple.

Second, we hear God's name sanctified in the answer to Zechariah's prayer.

And third, we see God's name sanctified *even* in Zechariah's failure to believe!

## 1. Treating God's Name as Holy: How Zechariah Approaches God (Luke 1:1-10)

Luke is the only gospel to begin with a dedication.

Matthew starts with a title:

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”

Mark starts with an introduction:

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”

John starts with a prologue:

“In the beginning was the Word...”

But Luke starts with a dedication to Theophilus (which means “lover of God”),  
*that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.* (1:4)

Luke writes for the sake of those who did not personally see Jesus.

He writes for Theophilus, and all like Theophilus,  
who love Jesus, but did not see Jesus.

In other words, Luke writes this to *you!*

And he writes so that you may have certainty.

And he starts with Zechariah:

*In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,  
of the division of Abijah.*

*And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.*

God had appointed the tribe of Levi to serve at the temple.

Within the tribe of Levi,

God had established Aaron and his sons as priests.

As the priestly house of Aaron increased,

the number of priests became too great for all of them to serve at once.

So in the days of David, the priests were organized in 24 divisions.

The high priest was supposed to be from the line of Zadok

(though this was not the practice in Jesus' time).

1 Chronicles 24 relates the organization of the priesthood,

revealing that the division of Abijah was the eighth division of priests.

So when the division of Abijah was on duty,

Zechariah would come to the temple in order to burn incense,

offer the daily offerings and perform the duties of the priesthood.

His wife, Elizabeth, was also descended from Aaron.

In Leviticus 21 the priests were commanded to marry only a virgin.

He was forbidden to marry a widow or a divorced woman, or a prostitute,

but must marry “a virgin of his own people.” (Lev 21:14)

There was some debate over whether “his own people” meant Israelites,

or just descendants of Aaron,

but the general rabbinic principle was, when in doubt, err on the side of strictness,

so the rule had become that in order to serve as a priest,

you could only marry within the priestly family.

*And they were both righteous before God,  
walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.*

Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous before God.  
They were blameless.

In other words, Zechariah and Elizabeth were “hallowing” God’s name.  
In their life and conduct, they did what God commanded.

Being blameless doesn’t mean that they were sinless.

After all, the law itself provided for how to deal with sin!

The priests regularly offered sacrifices for their own sins and for the sins of the people!  
To be righteous before God means that Zechariah and Elizabeth believed God’s promises,  
and walked in his ways,  
and they trusted in God’s provision for salvation.

*But they had no child,  
because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

Barrenness was viewed as a curse,  
and understandably so,  
because without the promised seed of the woman,  
there would be no undoing of the curse!

But Elizabeth is the last barren woman in the Bible.

Indeed, I am tempted to say that Elizabeth was the last barren woman in history!

There may be childless women today,  
but in Christ, there are no *barren* women!

To be barren is to be fruitless—to be unproductive—  
to have no place in God’s redemptive purposes;  
and while a single woman may never have a child,  
and some married women may prove unable to conceive and give birth,  
yet in Christ, the childless woman may prove to be a very fruitful tree!

But Zechariah and Elizabeth are portrayed in terms that echo Abraham and Sarah:  
because they are old—“advanced in years.”

*Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,  
according to the custom of the priesthood,  
he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.*

Zechariah is treating God’s name as holy

*And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.*

Notice that all of this happens while “the whole multitude of the people were praying.”

It was the hour of incense, and the people of God had gathered to pray.

In Rev 5:8 and 8:3-4 incense is said to symbolize the prayers of the saints.

Here the prayers of the people were arising to God,

in the midst of the worship of the temple,

and at that time, God responds by sending his messenger to Zechariah.

God *could* have sent Gabriel to Zechariah’s home.

But he sends his messenger to Zechariah in the temple.

God’s name is holy –

and so even as he spoke to Isaiah in the temple,

so now he sends his messenger to Zechariah in the temple.

## 2. “Your Prayer Has Been Heard”: What Was Zechariah Praying For? (Luke 1:11-17)

But, as in the call of Isaiah, where Isaiah saw the LORD in the temple (Is 6),

so now Zechariah sees the angel of the Lord at the right side of the altar of incense,

“and fear fell upon him.”

*But the angel said to him, ‘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.’*

The angel comes and says “your prayer has been heard.”

Had Zechariah been praying for a baby?

Probably not.

But that is not the point.

After all, what prayer had Zechariah just prayed?

He had offered incense at the hour of incense.

What prayer had he just offered?

The people had not all been gathered at the temple

to pray that Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a baby!

It’s okay to pray for a baby!

Hannah did in 1 Samuel 2 – and God heard her prayer and gave her a baby!

But there is nothing in the text that suggests that the prayer that Zechariah offered

had anything to do with having a baby!

The people had gathered to pray that God would deliver them from their enemies!

They were praying for the coming of the kingdom of God,

when God would bring righteousness on the earth –

when God would *sanctify* his name!

The Lord’s Prayer shows us how the coming of God’s kingdom

is for the purpose of hallowing – of making God’s name holy.

Think about what we've seen Sunday evenings in our series on the book of Numbers.  
Moses intercedes for Israel – asking that God would have mercy –  
for the sake of God's own name.

The coming of the kingdom is not the ultimate goal.  
The thing that we are to put first in our prayers  
is that God's name would be sanctified –  
that God would enable us and others to glorify him in all things.

That was at the heart of all the prayers of the Old Testament –  
it was at the heart of all the prayers of the temple.  
And it was *that* prayer that God was now answering.

*That* is what we need to learn about prayer!  
All of our individual desires—for children, for health, for friends, for whatever—  
need to be brought under our desire to see God's name sanctified!  
Because when God's name is sanctified,  
*then* everything else begins to fit into place.

Indeed, God answered Zechariah's prayer in a manner that *also* gave to them  
what they had longed for:  
a son.

Notice how Gabriel says it:  
“*You* will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth” –  
because John will be the one who makes the way ready for the Lord.  
Our individual prayers are brought into the big picture of what God is doing in history  
for the glory of his name,  
and for the salvation of his people.

After all, when was the last time Gabriel showed up?  
Gabriel is introduced in Daniel 8-9.  
And the last time Gabriel came was in response to Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9.

Daniel 9 is a great example of a prayer that prays “hallowed be thy name.”  
“O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love  
with those who love him and keep his commandments.” (9:4)  
Daniel acknowledges who Yahweh is—he is the covenant-keeping God.  
But there is a problem,  
because Israel has sinned.  
And so Daniel confesses, “we have sinned and done wrong.”  
He details the sins of the people in rebelling against Yahweh,  
and admits that God's judgment against them is just.  
Moses had promised that Israel would go into exile



if they continued to rebel,  
and sure enough, in Daniel's day, Israel is still in exile.  
But now, Daniel recognizes that the promised time has come.  
The faithful, covenant-keeping God has said that he would restore Jerusalem,  
and so Daniel prays that God's holy name would be vindicated:  
"We do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness,  
but because of your great mercy.  
"O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act.  
Delay not, for your own sake, O my God,  
because your city and your people are called by your name."

Zechariah would have looked at the broken-down church in his day –  
much as we look at the broken-down church in our day–  
as we endure yet another Babylonian captivity of the church,  
as the city of God appears to lie in bondage to the false glory of the city of man–  
we must pray that God's holy name would be vindicated.

"O God, have mercy upon your people,  
not because of our righteousness,  
but because we are called by your name!  
Your reputation–the sanctity of your name, O God, is at stake!  
Let your name be regarded as holy!  
And this will only happen as the nations are converted to your will,  
and as your church grows in the grace and wisdom of Christ!"

We need to have the same confidence as Daniel.  
Daniel remembered God's promises,  
and he prayed that God's name would be glorified.  
He was confident that God would act, because  
1) God had promised  
and 2) "your city and your people are called by your name."  
We are now citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.  
And more than that, we are children of our heavenly Father.  
We should therefore pray with boldness and confidence  
that what he has promised, he will do,  
because we are called by his name.  
God has placed his name upon you in your baptism.  
The reason why God will answer your prayers is not because of how good you are.  
It is because you are called by his name.  
His reputation is at stake.

And so there is also a sense in which the petition "hallowed be thy name"  
is also a prayer that *we* might be sanctified as well.  
It is to pray that God would re-orient *our* hearts to sanctify his glorious name!

As you can see from all these prayers,  
prayer is not primarily “about” us.  
We do not pray that *our* name would be set apart.  
We do not ask that we would receive glory and honor.  
We pray that God’s name would be set apart.  
We pray that he would receive glory and honor.

That’s one reason why we have a prayer of confession at the beginning of every worship service.  
We need to turn away from ourselves and be reminded who we are in Jesus Christ.  
We begin our worship by remembering that we are not the center of the universe.  
Jesus is!

In the later petitions we will begin to learn how to speak about ourselves,  
but the first lesson of prayer is that we must learn how to speak about God.  
We must be more concerned for the holiness of *his* name than for our own.

### **3. “Because You Did Not Believe My Words”: God’s Holy Name in Action (Luke 1:18-25)**

Now, Zechariah’s response is understandable:

*How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.*

Mary will ask a similar question in verse 34,  
*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*

Yet Gabriel considers Zechariah’s question a sign of unbelief,  
and Mary’s question perfectly consistent with faith.

Why?

You can see some of the reason in the difference in their circumstances:

1) Zechariah is a priest, while Mary is a teenage girl.

Priests should know better!

2) Zechariah is in the temple, while Mary is at home.

When angels show up in the temple, you really should not be doubting the message!

And finally, you see it in the difference in their questions:

Mary simply asks, “how will this be, since I am a virgin?”  
but Zechariah asks for a sign – “how will I know?”

There is all the difference in the world between Mary marveling at God’s holy name,  
and Zechariah focusing on his own situation.

And so the angel rebukes Zechariah:

*I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you  
and to bring you this good news (lit, “this gospel”).*

*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.*

Gabriel identifies himself as the same angel who had twice brought God's word to Daniel.  
Gabriel first came to Daniel in Daniel 8:16-26,  
where Gabriel explained Daniel's visions.  
Gabriel came again in Daniel 9 to explain to Daniel that 70 weeks of years must pass  
from the command to rebuild Jerusalem until  
God would "put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity,  
to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet,  
and to anoint a most holy place."  
The command to rebuild the temple happened around 458 BC.  
Seventy weeks of years would be 490 years,  
meaning that the coming of everlasting righteousness should be around 30 AD  
(which just happens to be right around the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus).

So when the angel Gabriel shows up precisely on time  
to announce the fulfillment of what had been said through Daniel,  
a priest in the temple should probably believe what he says!

And if you will not believe the Word of God, then God will shut you up!  
Isaiah believed the word of the LORD – and God cleansed his lips.  
Zechariah does not – and so God closes his mouth.

Zechariah comes out of the temple to a crowd that is wondering what has taken so long,  
and he finds that he is unable to speak.  
So he makes signs to them, and they quickly realize that he has seen a vision.  
And completing his service, he returns home.

Shortly thereafter Elizabeth conceives and she says,  
*Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me,  
to take away my reproach among people. (1:25)*

As had happened so often in the history of God's people,  
the barren woman will give birth to a son who will be mighty before the Lord.

So the Lord's Prayer begins first by reminding us to whom we are speaking:  
we are speaking to "our Father in heaven."  
But then, the first petition of the Lord's Prayer,  
the first thing that we ask for,  
is not for ourselves –  
but for God's name to be sanctified – for God's name to be made holy!