

MAGNIFICAT AND BENEDICTUS

-PART II

LUKE 1:39-80

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Zechariah's Song: "Benedictus"

Introductory Matters

Verses 57-66: A son is born; John. "He shall be called John." Immediately upon Zechariah's naming of his son John, his tongue is loosed and he spoke "blessing God".

The rejoicing continues that began with Mary's visit to Elisabeth and Zechariah. Now Zechariah rejoices over Mary's son and his son John.

This is the birth of not only a son- -but the very birth (or dawn) of a new age of God's covenant fulfilled!

Define "Benedictus"

Zechariah is Filled with the Holy Spirit and Bursts into Song! (v. 67): "Blessed [or "Praise"] be the Lord God of Israel..."

The title of the song "*Benedictus*" comes from the Latin *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*- "Blessed or Praise be the Lord God of Israel."

As we learned in Mary's 'Magnificat', Zechariah sings his song in "**prophetic past tense**" which means that what God says and promises can be spoken as if it is already fully accomplished—or as good as done.

Mary and Zechariah can sing as if all these things have already occurred.

"Prophetic Past Tense"

New Testament scholar Darrell Bock writes: "These events [Mary and Zechariah sing about] are seen as so certain that, even though they are future events, they can be **portrayed as past realities**... The total salvation of those who fear God is so certain that it can be viewed as having taken place." (ECNT, Bock, pg. 155).

New Testament scholar Leon Morris says in his Commentary on Luke: "...Mary may be referring to acts still future but which have begun to be realized. It is perhaps more likely that she is looking forward in a

spirit of prophecy and counting what God will do as **so certain that it can be spoken of as accomplished** (this is frequent in the Old Testament prophets).” – Luke, pp. 84-85.

*^{ESV} Luke 1:68-70 "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...*

The Holy Spirit and the Dawn of the New Covenant

If we are careful to observe the redemptive-historical context of these redemptive songs by Mary and Zechariah in this Old Covenant milieu that Luke describes, we might come to the conclusion that Zechariah’s song or “Benedictus” is ***the last prophecy of the Old Dispensation (Covenant), and the first prophecy of the New Covenant*** (see Farrar quoted in Leon Morris, pg. 87).

We should appreciate the presence of the Holy Spirit as he fills Zechariah and leads him to worship in spirit and truth (as Mary before him in “The Magnificat”). Zechariah reflects on WHO God is (his character), and WHAT HE HAS DONE (his acts and fulfilled promises).

The Holy Spirit, the Divine Third Person of the Trinity who spoke by the prophets of the Old Covenant and inspired their words and actions to declare the gospel to Israel, is now closing the Old Testament time period with a final prophecy, and the first New Testament proclamation of God’s faithfulness is being announced in the birth of John and Jesus!

“Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied...” (v. 67).

The Holy Spirit is powerfully present in prophecy at the dawn of the New Covenant!

Zechariah has been without speech since the Angel Gabriel announced the birth of John- -now he is filled with the Holy Spirit opens his mouth and praises God with all of his heart!

Zechariah praises God with a Psalm of thanksgiving or praise (similar to Old Testament Psalms):

^{ESV} **Psalm 41:13** Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.

^{ESV} **Psalm 72:18** Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

King David also used the language of “benedictus” kind of praise when his son Solomon was installed as King of Israel:

^{ESV} **1 Kings 1:48** And the king also said, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it.'"

Reformed Pastor R. Kent Hughes points out that here David’s first son Solomon and the ultimate Son of David were celebrated with identical praise to God (Luke, Vol. 1, pg. 74).

Zechariah is praising god in solo here, but he is joining a chorus of worshippers in spirit and truth who have preceded him by many years! “Great is the LORD and most worthy of our praise!”

Zechariah’s *Benedictus*:

Luke 1:68-75:

Blessed *be* the Lord, the God of Israel; For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people, ⁶⁹ And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of his servant David ⁷⁰ (As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old), ⁷¹ Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; ⁷² To show mercy towards, our fathers, And to remember his holy covenant; ⁷³ The oath which he spake unto Abraham our father, ⁷⁴ To grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies Should serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

New Testament scholar Ray Brown, a specialist on the Gospels, says that in Zechariah’s ‘Benedictus’ *there are as many as thirty-three allusions and quotations from the Old Testament in this brief song* (*The Birth of the Messiah*, Brown, pgs. 386-89).

With this in mind, it is important to trace the theological history and “story of Israel” that Zechariah sings of, and how he understands this history, this story of Israel as coming to a climatic conclusion (under the guidance and revelation of the Holy Spirit) in the Persons of John and Jesus.

Zechariah sings of three things particularly: (1) Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant; (2) Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant; and (3) The Title, Purpose, and Ministry of John the Baptist.

- **Zechariah Understands that the Old Testament Scriptures Are Coming to Fulfillment in His Life- -and more particularly in Jesus and John** (vv. 69-75).

(1) DAVIDIC COVENANT: God’s Covenant with David being Realized in Jesus and John.

Zechariah says God ‘has redeemed’ (v. 68): How has God redeemed and visited Israel? God has raised up a **“horn of salvation”** in the House (or “Dynasty”) of David (v. 69) Greek scholar Moffat writes that horn is a symbol of strength (as the horn of a bull), so that *horn of salvation* means a “mighty salvation” or a “strong Savior”.

As the might, strength and power of an animal, like a bull or a mountain ram, is concentrated in its horns, so God’s salvation power and might will be concentrated in Messiah, Mary’s son (Geldenhuis, NICNT, pg. 93)

Jesus is called the “horn of salvation from the Dynasty of David”.

There is an important theological connection here between the “horn of salvation” and the House or Dynasty of David:

^{NAS} **Psalm 132:17** *“[In Zion] I will cause the horn of David to spring forth; I have prepared a lamp for Mine anointed.*

David sings in 2 Samuel: ^{ESV} **2 Samuel 22:2-24:** He said, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, ³ my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, ***and the horn of my salvation***, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. ⁴ I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

Application: “We are weak, but he is strong.” We should never think we have outgrown singing the simple hymn ***“Jesus loves me”*** even when we are older, because the truth of our salvation that is revealed to sinners, especially as we grow older in Christ, is that we are truly indeed weak, and need a strong Savior, mighty to save.

The ***“horn of our salvation”*** ***is able to save us from our sins.*** He is able to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness; he is able to make us God-fearers, who love the Lord and our neighbor as ourselves; and he is able to teach us as his disciples how to walk in his ways.

As the author of the Book of Hebrews says, Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who come to him!

^{ESV} **Hebrews 7:25** ***Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.***

God has raised up a “horn of salvation”- -from where? From David’s House (or Dynasty):

“For us in the House or Dynasty of David”:

This is an ultimate and climatic fulfillment of Nathan’s prophecy to King David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16:

^{ESV} **2 Samuel 7:12-16:** When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, **I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.** ¹³ **He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.** ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

EXCURSUS: Mary of the House of David, too? This probably indicates that Mary was also of the Davidic line (although as we learned in the last sermon, it was not necessary). But if Zechariah sings this song about Messiah who has come (Mary’s baby) being a fulfillment of the House of David, before he knew what had happened with Joseph (recorded in Matthew 1:18ff), then it seems plausible that Mary was from the same line of David (but again, it is not necessary because of her betrothal to Joseph).

God has visited us with salvation “as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old...” (v.70).

- ***The birth of Jesus was the climactic fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets (v. 70)***

^{ESV} ***Luke 1:70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old...***

^{ESV} **Isaiah 9:6-7:** **For to us a child is born,** to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, **on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.** The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 11:1-5:** **There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.** ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and

understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

We are reminded of the end of Luke's gospel where Jesus on the Road to Emmaus is astonished that they have not understood the prophets, and he reminds his disciples:

And he said to them, "**O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!**" ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ **And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself....**- Luke 24:25-27

- *Salvation, mercy has come to us from God (vv. 71-72)*

(2) **ABRAHAMIC COVENANT: God's covenantal promises to Abraham are being realized** (vv. 72-73)

^{ESV} Luke 1:72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant...

God has remembered his covenant promises made not only to David, but to Abraham, the foundational covenant revelation of God's promises to His people in the Old Testament.

God has "remembered"; remember Exodus 2:24 where God "remembers" his covenant? This means that God is bringing about the fulfillment of his promises, NOT that he somehow forgot it!

^{ESV} **Exodus 2:24** And God heard their groaning, and **God remembered his covenant** with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

God is bringing about the greater Exodus than we see from Egypt- -through Jesus Christ the Exodus will be from slavery to sin, death and the devil!

Micah the Prophet would also continue to point the people forward to the day when God would "remember" his covenant to Abraham:

^{ESV} **Micah 7:20** You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

- **The Gospel to Israel in Mary's 'Magnificat' and Zechariah's 'Benedictus'**

Review of Mary's 'Magnificat' and the connection between both songs:

^{ESV} **Luke 1:54-55:** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, *to Abraham and to his offspring forever.*"

The last strophes of Mary's hymn are a revelation of the gospel to the Nation of Israel.

In Jesus the Messiah, Mary is singing that the covenant promises to Israel are being realized: "to Abraham and to his offspring forever." Let us look at a few Old Covenant passages:

Old Testament Promises:

^{ESV} **Genesis 12:3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*"

^{ESV} **Genesis 17:7-8:** *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.* ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

^{ESV} **Genesis 18:18** seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and *all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?*

^{ESV} **Genesis 22:16-18:** God spoke to Abraham and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ *I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,* ¹⁸ *and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*"

Compare this promise with Galatians 3:16, 26-29:

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:26-29:** for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

God is raising up a people to serve him in fear, in holiness, and in righteousness (v. 75)

(3) John the Baptist as the Last of the Old Testament Prophets

John the Baptist's Title, Purpose and Ministry

A. John's Title:

The Prophet of the Most High (v. 76)- He will not be the Son of the Most High- -but he will be the "Prophet of the Most High".

B. John's Purpose and Ministry:

1. Go before the Lord to prepare his ways (v. 76)

John the Baptist would be the great herald of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the one who would "roll out the red carpet" and call the King's subjects to obedience and worship of him.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 40:1-5:** **Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.** ² 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. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

^{ESV} **Malachi 3:1-2:** **"Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me.** 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. ²

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

^{ESV} **John 1:23** He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

2. Proclaim salvation and the forgiveness of sins (vv. 77-79)

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."*

a. Knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins (the gospel!).

- John the Baptist, Zechariah's son will be a preacher of the gospel! He will preach good news and warn those who refuse it!
- Not merely a change in outward, external behavior (many in Israel were able to look and appear righteous), but truly John's mission was to ***get to the heart of the matter.***
- A bare knowledge of salvation is not only what we need, we also need a knowledge of our sinfulness before God- -our need for the forgiveness of sins- -our need for a Savior, strong and mighty to save.
- Can you say before God that you deserve nothing but his wrath, and that you as a sinner are trusting only in the merits of the perfect life and Law-keeping of Jesus?
- Are you trusting in the death of Christ for you, knowing that God placed your great debt of sin upon Jesus, and gave to you HIS righteousness, so that your right standing before God (your justification) is by faith alone in the perfect work of Christ for you?

Jesus came to his own, but many did not receive him, but to those who did (and do!) receive him, he gives eternal life. Jesus came seeking the lost!

^{ESV} **John 1:11-13:** He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Application: Many cannot believe God's grace revealed in Jesus (it is just too "amazing"- it is just too strange!)- including Christians sometimes. Remember that sinners fluctuate back and forth between **self-righteousness** and **self-condemnation**.

We should always remember the story of Zaccheus, a rich, sinful tax collector, hated by many for his wicked deeds against them.

Zaccheus was the kind of man who was considered the last person in the neighborhood to "get religion"! Zaccheus is a picture of one who was obviously lost, with no hope of righteousness of his own (as all of us!).

Yet Jesus graciously and mercifully sought him out and went to visit him- -and the knowledge of salvation and the forgiveness of sins became a reality for him!

Luke 19:9-10: And Jesus said to him, "*Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.*"¹⁰ *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

- b. *The sunrise ("Dayspring" in Old English) shall visit us (or "when the sunrise shall dawn upon us") from on high.*

^{ESV} **Malachi 4:1-3:** "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."² **But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.** You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall."³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

Jesus is the light of the world, the light that is dawning or rising, and giving light to those who sit in darkness! As Isaiah 9:2 says:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 9:2** The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

- c. *To give light to those who sit in darkness* (The Greek literally says: "Those who are 'sitting in darkness'." (dungeon language- -bondage, chains, etc.).
- **Sinners are not free to choose God;** we are in bondage to sin. We are enslaved to our passions, to our sins, as we follow the Prince of the Power of the air, dead in trespasses and sins as the Apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:1-4. But God, who is rich in mercy, saves those who believe!

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:1-4:** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ **But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...**

The “tender mercy” (or “bowels of mercy”) of God’s love toward us in Christ- -what a *joy and a relief for sinners!*

When John Wesley sings of our redemption in the hymn ‘And Can It Be That I Should Gain’, he writes eloquently and captures this truth of Zechariah’s “Benedictus”:

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature’s night; thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; my chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed thee...Amazing love, How can it be? That thou my God shouldst die for me?”

- **EXCURSUS on the Nation of Israel:** What should we make of the political language that Zechariah uses (particularly in chapter 1:70-74? Zechariah uses political language about Christ’s redemption and says that what was spoken to Israel in the Old Testament by the prophets is coming to pass. Does Zechariah see this coming to fulfillment literally, or does he emphasize the spiritual redemption of Israel?

^{ESV} **Luke 1:70-74:** “...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...”

- Does this mean that Israel’s hope is literal and realized in political fulfillment as a nation? This passage can be confusing, especially if you have been influenced by Premillennial Dispensationalism.

The important thing to notice is context here (Luke 1:68-79), as well as the broader Scriptural teaching (remember that

scripture interprets scripture). In Zechariah's 'Benedictus' he speaks politically because God revealed his salvation throughout the Old Covenant in types, one being the Nation of Israel as a type of the people who would one day inhabit the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Political understanding was a typological understanding (in other words, Israel as a nation was a type or picture of the "one true nation under God which is the Church, cf. 1 Peter 2:9-11).

When Jesus comes preaching about His Kingdom, he clearly says that His Kingdom is NOT OF THIS WORLD (John 18:36), and so a political understanding would come to be understood more fully in Christ as a redemption from sin, death, and all our spiritual as well as earthly enemies in Jesus (i.e. those who oppose God and his salvation; those who persecute us for righteousness sake, etc..

Zechariah does indeed speak politically about the Nation of Israel being rescued from enemies, etc. but in 1:77-79 he explains what this means: this is a release from bondage to sin, death, and a salvation that will be fully realized on the Last Day (to shine light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death and lead the feet in the way of shalom-peace).

John the Baptist, Zechariah's son would announce something greater than a mere political freedom from bondage (although it would include that); John would announce the salvation and forgiveness of sins. John would call the Nation of Israel to repentance, and their only hope of redemption would be in Christ Jesus *alone!*

Read Carefully:

The real redemption the Nation of Israel needed and continues to need, as well as all Gentile sinners, is a redemption and deliverance from the power of spiritual enemies- -sin and the forces of darkness and to escape the wrath of God that is coming on those who do not believe, whether Jew or Gentile- -but for those who believe Christ is the glory and power of God- -He is our redemption and salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30-31; Geldenhuys, pg. 95).

Here is the hope of both Jew and Gentile:

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:26-29:** for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

In today's politically-correct charged culture, you may be called an "Anti-Semite" because you say that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, truth about God, and eternal life from God.

But, although painful, it is better if you are called unfairly "Anti-Semitic" than "Anti-God" or "Anti-Christ" because you reject (whether Jew or Gentile) the only hope and Redeemer of mankind in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ!

d. *To give light to those who sit in the shadow of death* (Sheol, grave language).

- **Sinners are not just in darkness, but they are literally the "living dead".**

The picture here is one of travelers on seeking their destination find themselves sitting in pitch black darkness and are terrified and powerless to help themselves, expecting that at any moment to be overwhelmed by wild beasts or enemies (Geldenhuis, pg. 95).

Then...a great light appears and fills them with life, and guides them to their destination!

- **From death to life in Jesus Christ, who is the Resurrection and the Life:**

^{ESV} **John 11:25** Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live..."

^{ESV} **Hebrews 2:14-17:** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, **he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,** ¹⁵ **and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.** ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and

faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

e. *To guide believers into the way of peace (“shalom”)*- This is the destination we as travelers find in Jesus Christ: reconciliation and peace with God that was lost in the fall of man.

Oxford scholar and professor Gilbert Murray (1866-1957) was one of the greatest scholars of Ancient Greek Culture. He wrote the classic book *‘Five Stages of Greek Religion’* in 1925 and he learned through the Greeks and from observation around him to describe man in this way:

"Depression, gloom, pessimism, despair, discouragement, these slay ten human beings to every one murdered by typhoid, influenza, diabetes or pneumonia. If tuberculosis is the great white plague, then fear is the great black plague."

We have been travelers in the fearful darkness of sin and death, but in Christ we find our life, light and the One who promises to never leave us nor forsake us; the One who says that he will be with us even unto the end of the Age; the One who brings peace with God and man, salvation from sins, and forgiveness each day of our lives!

This is our hope!

Conclusion

Yet many in the Nation of Israel did not believe like Mary, Elisabeth and Zechariah. In fact, when Elisabeth’s baby John would grow up and begin his ministry many years later, many in Israel had yet to repent and grasp by faith the salvation and forgiveness of sins preached by John and found in Jesus Christ!

Notice John’s words to the Nation of Israel recorded later in Luke’s Gospel:

Luke 3:7-14: He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers [*“Seed of the Serpent”*!]! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [*Already in John’s ministry the wrath of God was being realized in unrepentant hearts!*]

⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. [*Do not trust in merely your ethnicity, when you have hard and unbelieving hearts.*]

⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." [The Last Day judgment of God has begun...]

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³ And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." [John is saying "get in line with the eschatological reversal that is taking place in the world by God's grace: Seek NOT to be self-sufficient SELF-worshippers who are proud, mighty and rich, rather be dependent upon God and his grace by being humble, lowly and hungry]

Yet those who believe in Christ will be greater even than John the Baptist!

²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is he of whom it is written, "' Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' ²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

Do you believe?

The hope of the world is Jesus Christ. Salvation is found in no other name!

Jews and Gentiles still have the voice of Zechariah's son John proclaiming: "Repent and turn to Christ—the only hope of salvation, full redemption from your slavery to sin, death and the devil."

John the Baptist still speaks through Scripture preparing the way for the return of Jesus Christ. His message is still simply "repent and believe". Repent of your sins before a holy God, and believe upon the only Son of God for your salvation.

He is the light of the world; he is the only life eternal! He gives light to those who dwell (or sit) in darkness and those who live in the shadow of death.

The Dayspring (sunrise of Jesus Christ) has dawned in the empty tomb and in his resurrection and ascension to God's right hand- -believe upon him and you will be saved.

This was the hope of Elisabeth, Mary, Zechariah, John the Baptist and all Christians who have been made alive even while dead!

Let us pray!

My Exegetical Notes from the Text

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. ⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her [The joyous time of singing and fellowship continues!].

⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John."

⁶¹ And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." [In this culture all of the boys were named after someone in their family, so this was a unique "naming" when John was circumcised; John's given name by YHWH himself shows the uniqueness of his ministry; John means "YHWH has given grace"] ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John."

And they all wondered. [Everyone was in awe of God's working in this family, and in Israel]

⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷ 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 [Aorist "Prophetic past" tense: "God has visited and redeemed his people" that in the coming of John and Jesus, God's plans have already been fulfilled] ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ["Horn of salvation" or "power of God's salvation" has come in the House or "Dynasty" of David- 2 Samuel 7:12-18] ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, [This work of God in the infant prophet and infant king was prophesied many years ago; cf. Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1ff; 40:1-5; 2 Samuel 7- Nathan to David; Daniel 7; Malachi 3-4- Malachi to Israel] ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; [Israel's salvation from their enemies would be more than Zechariah fully expected and understood at this point] ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, [God's covenant promises he made to Moses and David] 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. [This is the full meaning of God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17.]

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High [contrasted with Jesus being called "Son of the Most High", Luke 1:32]; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, [Isaiah 40:1 ff]⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, [A reference to Isaiah 61:1-4; Malachi 3-4]⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Luke 24:25-27, 44-47:²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself... "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.