

The Preparation for Christmas

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[0:00] Take your Bibles this morning and open them to the Gospel according to Luke and find verse 5.

! Luke chapter 1 verse 5. Did I say chapter 1? I think I may have missed saying chapter 1. Chapter 1 verse 5 is where we're going to begin reading.

And actually our full text for this morning is quite lengthy. It includes not only verses 5 through 25, but the second part of the text takes up with verse 67.

And 67 on to the end of the chapter. So verses 5 through 25, 67 through 80. Now I'm going to wait until later on in the sermon to read 67 through 80.

And so let me go ahead and read for us this morning verses 5 through 25. Alright? Confused? Luke 1, 5 through 25.

[1:09] There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias of the division of Abijah.

His wife was of the daughters of Aaron and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and the ordinances of the Lord, blameless.

But they had no child. Because Elizabeth was barren and they were both well advanced in years.

So it was that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

[2:24] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.

He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

And Zacharias said to the angel, How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years. And the angel answered and said to him, I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.

But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in your own time, their own time.

And the people waited for Zacharias and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them. And they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

[3:44] So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. After those days, his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she hid herself five months, saying, Thus the Lord has dealt with me in the days when he looked on me to take away my reproach among people.

Now we'll get to the rest or the second part of the text a little bit later in the sermon, as I've said. But I want to go back to something we considered last Sunday.

Luke addressed this book, the book of Luke, as well as this second volume of his writing, the book of Acts. He addressed these two volumes that we could call his gospel, certainly the gospel according to Luke, and then I think also we have a continuation of the story in the book of Acts, that

is the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke addressed both these volumes to this man he named Theophilus. And we really don't know who Theophilus was. You know, we talked a little bit about this last week.

Theophilus is kind of a strange name. In fact, I heard about a couple who were having their first child. And it was an exciting time for them. It was to be a boy. And after the baby's delivery, the nurse brought the new infant into the room for the parents to enjoy.

[5:10] And when they looked at their baby for the very first time, they were somewhat disappointed. There was no denying it. It was difficult to admit it, but the baby was ugly.

Just an ugly baby. And they looked at that baby and they just couldn't deny it. This is an ugly baby. And the nurse was not much help. She asked the new parents, what have you named the child? And all the excitement, they had forgotten to pick a name. And when they shared their desire to pick a biblical name, the nurse suggested the name Theophilus. Theophilus. And she said, that's Theophilus looking baby I have ever seen.

Okay. I'm sorry, but I had to get that joke in there sometime. I left it out last week and so I had to grace you with it this morning. But in reality, the name Theophilus is a good name.

It would be a good biblical name. Now, I doubt anybody's going to choose that name for their son, but it would be a good name. As you might recall last week, I noted that the name Theophilus means lover of God.

[6:16] That would be a good name for anyone to go by. But now, just who Theophilus was, we don't know. We really don't know. Now, we can infer some things from the text, from Luke's text, what he includes in his few words that he gives us here.

We can conclude, I think, that he was a real person. I don't think this is some symbolic name for a group of people. He was a real person, though his name may have been an alias.

And I think we can also say, safely, that he was a Gentile. Luke's intended readership were Gentiles. And so Theophilus, it being a Greek name, it's very likely that he was a Gentile.

And I think also that Theophilus was a man of some political importance in his day. Though we don't know that for sure. I think we can infer that from Luke's address here.

He addressed him, most excellent Theophilus. And when you consider the other three times that we have that address, so there are a total of four in the Scriptures.

[7:23] And by the way, all four are in Luke's writings. When we put all those together, I think we can understand that Theophilus was, very likely, a high government official.

You can look, for example, at Acts 23, and again in Acts 24, and then again in Acts 26. In those two first references, we have Paul addressing the governor Felix as most excellent Felix.

And a little bit later, Felix's replacement. Festus, we have Paul addressing him as most excellent Festus. And so it's pretty clear, I think, that Theophilus, whoever he was, was a government official. And it has caused some to conjecture that Theophilus may have been a Roman governor. In fact, possibly even the very official that was to hear the Apostle Paul's case and to make some judgment there in Rome.

Now, it's an interesting possibility but again, we don't know for sure. And the question is, does it really matter? I mean, does it matter who he was? And I would say probably not.

[8:31] Probably not. What matters is Luke's purpose, his reason for writing Theophilus.

That matters. Do we know anything about that? Well, we do. Very clear. And we looked at this last week. In verse 4, Luke says, in verse 4, that you, Theophilus, may, what?

Know. Know for certainty. That is, know the undoubted truth of those things, what things? The things pertaining to Christ.

To know those things in which you were instructed. This is Luke's purpose for writing the book and I think also his second volume, the book of Acts.

And so in that sense, I would say that Theophilus, whoever he was, represents all potential readers of this gospel and the second volume to it.

[9:31] Potential readers. Those in the immediate sense. Those who would read it for the very first time. The first time it was published and circulated. And also, of course, all readers sense, including us today.

So he represents us. Now, Luke chapter 2 is the first, I think, clearly the first major event in God's redemptive plan.

It is, I think we could call the first high water mark in the Gospel of Luke. And it is, of course, the narrative of those things pertaining to the birth of Christ.

The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Which is, by the way, what we're to be celebrating this time of the year. God becoming a man. Now, having said that, chapter 1 is all about God's preparation for that glorious event.

For those in the immediate sense, that is, his preparation of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Chapter 1 deals with that. Also, his preparation of Mary, the soon-to-be mother of Jesus.

[10:45] So in chapter 1, we have God's preparation for Mary. And then, through Luke's account given to Theophilus, we see him preparing Theophilus.

Preparing him. Preparing his head and his heart to embrace the full significance of this event. The event of the birth of Christ.

And then, of course, through Theophilus, all readers who would come after, he is preparing us. Preparing us for the full significance of Christmas.

Now, by the way, are you prepared for Christmas? Christmas. And right off, some of you are thinking gift buying. And you're probably thinking, well, pastor, counting today, we have 23 shopping days left until Christmas.

But you know, I'm not talking about that kind of preparation. Here's what I'm talking about. Are you prepared in head and heart for Christmas?

[11:57] Are you prepared for it? If you're not, or if you're a little unclear about just what I'm talking about, let's consider this morning how Luke describes God's preparation of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

And then next Sunday, we'll consider how God prepared Mary for Christmas. And we could sum it up in one very full statement.

And here it is. To prepare your head and heart for the celebration of Christmas, you must fully embrace three glorious realities at work in the birth of Christ.

And here they are. The sovereign plan of God. The supernatural power of God. And the saving purpose of God.

Now that bears repeating. To prepare your head and heart for the celebration of Christmas, you must fully embrace three glorious realities at work in the birth of Jesus Christ.

[13:12] The sovereign plan of God. The supernatural power of God. And the saving purpose of God. Now, these three realities, I would suggest to you, if you really pay attention as you read chapter 1, these three realities are pretty easy to pick out.

To see here in chapter 1. And what I mean is this. Even a casual rather casual examination of the chapter, chapter 1, from verse 5 on to the end of the chapter, reveals a recognizable pattern.

I challenge you to this week, read chapter 1, especially verses 5 on to the end of the chapter, and see if you can find this pattern. It's very clear, really.

And it's really quite incredible. Here's the pattern. two births, first of all, two births are announced in advance by the archangel Gabriel.

You have the birth of John the Baptist announced. You have the birth of Jesus announced. That's pretty clear in the text, in chapter 1. We have two birth announcements here in chapter 1, but they are announcements made before the fact.

[14:31] Alright? And so here's the idea in this pattern. Here's the truth, the reality that we must see. That God announces what He's going to do before He does it, and nothing and no one can change it.

The sovereign plan of God. That's the first part of the pattern. Second, two births are to occur under miraculous conditions.

That's announced here in chapter 1. Two births are announced before they happen, and both births, two births, are to occur under miraculous supernatural conditions.

Okay? John is to be born to aged parents, parents who are past the child-bearing, rearing age. He is to be born to a woman who is sterile.

It's a miracle. And of course, Jesus, you know, is to be born to a virgin. Clearly a miracle. But both are miracles. Both are miraculous births that are announced here in chapter 1.

[15:43] And both are undeniable proofs of God's supernatural, absolute power. power. The supernatural power of God.

The third part of the pattern. Since God is not some divine showman, since God never just simply displays His supernatural power to merely impress puny human beings, since that's not God's approach, then here's the third part of the pattern.

Both births are openly declared to be part of God's eternal redemptive plan to save sinners. That's the pattern.

You see, here in chapter 1. This is all preparatory to chapter 2. Well, John's birth takes place here in chapter 1, but especially chapter 2 and the birth of Jesus.

All these are preparatory. These three realities are clearly visible in Luke's account of how God prepared His choice people for the birth of His Son, ultimately.

[16:53] Now, that's a good broad outline of chapter 1, starting with verse 5 and on to the end of the chapter, so let's put some meat to it. Let's put some flesh on this skeletal outline, albeit very profound statements, from the first chapter of Luke.

Let's begin, number 1, with the sovereign plan of God. The sovereign plan of God. Again, God announces what He's going to do before He actually does it.

Now, He's not doing something and then explaining what He did after the fact. He is announcing what He's going to do before He actually does it, and nothing and no one can stop Him.

No one can stop Him from doing it. No one can change what He's doing. Amos 3, verse 7 says, Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants, the prophets.

Only here in Luke 1, His messenger, His servant, is celestial, not earthly. It is an angel. His messenger is an angel. It is the holy angel, Gabriel.

[18:07] and what He says to Zacharias will happen. It will happen. It will occur. See, listen, God is sovereign and God works His plan in spite of all earthly obstacles.

Clearly. And why does He do that? Because He can. And because He chooses to. And what God chooses to do, He will surely do.

Now, let me give you some clear proofs from this text. There are four of them. We can see at least four proofs of the sovereign plan of God here in this text.

Number one, God chooses the moment in which He's going to do it. Clearly indicated in the text.

God chooses the moment in which He's going to work His plan, accomplish His plan, His sovereign plan.

That is, God is sovereign over time. And He's sovereign over the timing of things. He knows all ends. He knows all scenarios. And He works to accomplish His plan according to schedule and the things of time and the things in time are not going to stop Him.

[19:27] He is sovereign. He chooses the moment in which He's going to do it. And you know, if you would consider this contrary to the way you and I would have done it if we were God, God did not choose a time in the history of Israel when they were experiencing some spiritual revival.

Quite the opposite. He chooses a time of spiritual darkness. He chooses a time of spiritual barrenness. And the first indication of this, I think, comes from the words in verse 5, in the days of Herod, the king of Judea.

Now, that's more than just simply a statement about the historical timing of this thing. It's a tremendous statement about the spiritual condition of the times.

It was a time of darkness. Herod's title that Luke gives us here, king of Judea, that very title, dear people, was the height of insult to the Jews.

Insult. Even blasphemous. That there would be this king named Herod, who is, king of Judea. Herod was a puppet king.

[20:47] He was a vassal of the Roman Empire. Herod was an Edomite, not an Israelite. He was not a Jew. Listen, it had been over 500 years since Israel had a king sitting on the throne.

And now they had this descendant of Esau sitting on the throne of Israel. And he was a puppet king whose strings were manipulated and controlled by Israel's oppressors, the Roman Empire.

This was a dark time. And let's just consider something about Herod's rule. Herod's rule was wicked. Herod himself was a degenerate, wicked, ruler, and corrupt.

Herod's chief problem was jealousy. He just thought somebody was always out to get his throne.

And Herod's jealousy was to a fault. His jealousy carried him to the point of ruthless paranoia.

He had his own wife murdered, her brother murdered, her mother murdered, and several of his sons murdered because he feared they were taking over his throne.

[22:02] Herod was a ruthless paranoia. And later on, of course, you know that he slaughtered thousands of innocent children so that he could somehow snuff out the life of this would-be king of the Jews that would be born in Bethlehem.

You know the story of that. And by the way, on Herod's death, he had given prior orders that when he died, that several very high profile, prominent citizens in Jerusalem would also be executed so that at least somebody would be mourning on the day of his death.

What a man this Herod was. Wicked, ruthless man. There's a second indication though of the darkness of the times in which God chose to send his son.

Luke chapter verse 10 tells us this. In verse 10 Luke says, and the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. That's an interesting bit of information in the way Luke gives it.

You know Luke was very detailed about things and Luke never gave specific information unless he had some kind of reason behind it or purpose for it. I think this again is an indication of the darkness of the times.

[23:22] Not just politically. And it certainly was that. Under the oppression of the Roman Empire. Under the rulership of this vassal King Herod. But it was also a time of darkness religiously.

Religiously. In this time temple worship had become corrupt. Later you know that Jesus is going to deal with this issue in his famous cleansing of the temple.

So temple worship had been corrupt. Not something that Israel enjoyed doing and was blessed by. But it had become a drudgery. It had become a burden. It was corrupt.

But also the priesthood had become corrupt in this time. The buying and the selling of priestly offices. Even the position of the high priest had fallen prey to political corruptness in this day. the result all of this a spiritual barrenness had all but eclipsed the worship of Yahweh God in Israel.

[24:29] Something that really did not change even with the advent of Jesus. Something that really has not changed since. It even exists today. And I don't think we'll even be restored until we get to the end of the tribulation and on into the millennium.

the corruption of the worship of Yahweh God among Israel. Barren. They were barren spiritually. And I think Elizabeth's barrenness was a symbol of that.

She was not barren because she was a sinner under the disfavor of God. She was righteous in his sight. No, her barrenness was just symptomatic.

A symbol of the barrenness of the nation of Israel in this time. Dark time. And I think Luke's mention of this multitude of the people praying outside the hour of incense, I think it was intended to give us an indication of just how desperate the people had become for a fresh moving of God and a fresh word from God.

In fact, I think they were desperate for any word from God, no matter what it was. God had been silent now for 400 years. 400 years.

[25:42] There had been no word from God, not a peep from God. 400 years. There had been no prophet of God for 400 years. There had been no word from God for 400 years.

The people were desperate for a word from God. You know, the condition, dark condition of Israel in this day makes me think of our day and the spiritual darkness of our day and our country. glory. How we desperately need a fresh moving of God, something we've not seen, not nationwide in the long, long, long time.

Desperately need for word from God. And we're talking here about the sovereign plan of God. And God chooses the moment in which He's going to do it.

Second, God chooses the mortals through whom He will do it. God chooses the mortals through whom He will accomplish His plan.

[27:00] And God chose two very unlikely people through whom He would accomplish His sovereign plan. Zacharias and Elizabeth. Very common people.

Look at what Luke says about them. There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias. of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron.

So they're both descendants of Aaron. And her name was Elizabeth. And they, now pay attention to what He says next, and they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Now first notice that in regard to these two that He chose. God had sovereignly prepared their lives for the task He had chosen for them.

Sovereignly prepared them. Two things are said about them. Two things point to their righteousness. Positionally, that is in their position before God, they were righteous. [28:14] righteous. That's justified before God, justified by faith. He says that they were both righteous before God. So positionally, inwardly, justified before God.

But He says also that they were practically righteous. Not almost righteous, but practically speaking, they were righteous. He says that they were walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

This speaks of their sanctification. They were justified before God and they were being sanctified before God. They were positionally, inwardly, righteous by God's grace and they were practically, outwardly, righteous in terms of sanctification.

That is, they were living out the reality of their hearts, their position before God. God had divinely prepared them for this very important task.

Second, God had sovereignly prepared their names for the task. This is really quite interesting. The name Zacharias means Yahweh remembers.

[29:28] That's what the name means. Yahweh remembers. The name Elizabeth, his wife, means Yahweh's promise. Or really the stronger word, oath.

putting those together, God has not forgotten his promise. God has not forgotten.

He remembers his oath to send a Redeemer, to send his Messiah. And then God blesses them with a son and chooses his name.

And the name John means Yahweh is gracious. gracious. You see, the sovereign plan of God. He chooses two very unlikely people to accomplish his purpose, his plan.

God chooses the moment in which he's going to do it. God chooses the mortals through whom he is going to do it. And third, God chooses the method by which he's going to do it.

[30:37] The method. And this is very interesting as well. And we just see the sovereignty of God at work here. Verse 6 tells us that there was this man, this priest named Zacharias and that he was of the division of Abijah.

That doesn't mean that he was a descendant of some fellow named Abijah. That's not his family name or his lineage. This is something else. And what does it mean? Well, every male descendant or member of the descendants of Aaron were entitled to serve in the temple.

They were priests unto the Lord. Zacharias was one of these. He was a descendant of Aaron. And so every descendant of Aaron was to serve in the temple and since there were some 18,000 priests serving in the temple, sometime during the time of David's rule they were divided into 24 divisions. 24 divisions. And each division of the priesthood were to serve two weeks every year in the temple. Now Zacharias was of the division of Abijah. That just designated his division. Now look at what Luke writes in verse 8. So it was that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division according to the custom of the priesthood his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

[32:04] When it says the temple of the Lord it's talking about a particular place within the temple proper. It was the holy place. You know in the inner part of the temple you had the holy place and the holiest of place or the holy of holies divided of course by this partition called the veil a thick veil.

And so the priest a priest was allowed to go into the holy place but only the high priest was allowed to go into the holiest of places the holy of holies.

So it was his lot the Bible says here to serve the incense to burn the incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

So that was his duty. And by the way this was the highest honor for a priest to serve in this way. To go into the holy place and to maintain the altar of incense that was in there an altar by the way that was perpetually burning.

They would never let that fire go out. Always burning incense which signified the prayers of Israel going up to God. And so that altar of incense was never ever to go out and so it was his duty to go into the place the holy place and to maintain that altar.

[33:26] That altar sat right there right in front of the veil that led into the holy of holy. Now this duty according to scripture here not just here in Luke but also in the Old Testament it was chosen his duty was chosen by some sort of lottery we could call it.

His lot was to serve. And since there were thousands of priests and since by law a priest no priest was allowed to do this twice this was a once in a lifetime opportunity to perform this most sacred of

priestly duties.

Zacharias was thrilled by this to be chosen to do it that the lot fell to him. In fact many priests never ever had the opportunity they were never chosen.

And so we might be thinking well this what a chance happening for Zacharias you know like throwing the dice and wow he won no no no the way Luke presents this is very clear that Luke that for Luke this was not according to chance or fate for Luke this was the result of sovereignty the sovereignty of God God was in control of this and it will be while Zacharias is in the holy place performing his once in a lifetime duty it's going to be during this time that God breaks his 400 year silence this is really incredible it's thrilling when you think about it and so that leads to a fourth thing fourth proof

God chooses his messenger God chooses the messenger through whom he is going to announce his plan and the messenger according to verse 19 is Gabriel this angel is named and this is no ordinary angel this is Gabriel this is an archangel even Gabriel said that I'm one who stands in the presence of God this is a very important angel Gabriel is God's archangel Gabriel is God's chief messenger as a matter of fact used of God both in the Old and New Testament to communicate some of the most significant announcements pertaining to God's redemptive plan you can go look in Daniel and see him appearing there in Daniel in Daniel 8 and also again in

[36:28] Daniel 9 to not only explain but also to give prophecies concerning end times as well incredible angel but now look at what this angelic messenger says verse 8 so it was that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division and then verse 11 an angel of the Lord appeared to him standing on the right side of the altar of incense let's skip to verse 13 and the angel said to him do not be afraid Zacharias for your prayer is heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son now notice that and you shall call his name John and you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth for he will be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink he will also be filled with the

Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God now I emphasize the word will did you notice that notice all the times the angel spoke that word will you will she will bear a son you will have joy many will rejoice at his birth! will be great in sight of the Lord he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God over and over again the sovereign plan of God he tells us what he's going to do before he does it and nothing and no one can stop him God the sovereign plan of God that leads us to the second reality that we must embrace in order to prepare our heads and hearts for Christmas first the sovereign plan of God and second the supernatural power of God you see God not only announces what he's going to do before he does it but God is able to do it God is able!

do all that he purposes to do all that he now you and I we can say we're going to do something and maybe we can and maybe we can't maybe we can pull it off and maybe we can't maybe we can do it and maybe we cannot do it maybe we don't have the power to do it we want to and we say we're going to do it and our word is our bond but when it comes down to it maybe every single time notice he's able to work his plan he has the power to do it even in spite of spiritual hindrances and Zachariah is the example of that he's able to do it in spite of Zachariah's spiritual hindrances Zachariah was fearful as we are many times and

Zachariah's was faithless as we are certainly many times fearful and faithless Zachariah's was fearful verse 12 and when Zachariah's saw him saw this angel he was troubled and fear fell upon him you just got a picture of that can't you as a matter of fact the word that is used here he fear fell upon him or excuse me the word troubled rather is a word that means tremor means earthquake that is his body began to shake he's quaking with fear I think we would be too cause me to remember several years ago when Jonathan was just a little little kid probably stood no taller than that barely could walk we took him to the fair and you know we always like to take the boys to the fair and especially like to see all the animals you know the barnyard animals the big cows and sheep and the hogs you know incredible how big these things are so

[40:54] I took Jonathan over to one of the cages they had all these cages all these prize hogs out there you know and took him and we kind of crouched down by the doorway to one of these little little cages and so I'm standing there or crouched down there with Jonathan we're looking at that hog and suddenly that hog rushed to the gate of that that that his prison and and Jonathan even before he peeped any kind of cry or yell he was shaking his whole body was shaking and then

of course eventually the cries came out sorry Jonathan I had to tell that story that's the idea here here's Zacharias he's in there performing his duty and he's about to make sure the fire make sure the fire is the fuel for the fire in the altar of incense is fed and here is this holy angel this angel Gabriel standing there beside the altar and Zacharias is overcome with fear that does not stop

God from accomplishing his purpose Zacharias was also faithless faithless look at verse 18 and Zacharias said to the angel how shall I know this translation I don't believe you help me out here give me some kind of proof it's faithlessness he said for I'm an old man and that was true and my wife is well advanced in years that's a very political kind of democratic way you know he didn't say she's an old woman he's a pretty smart fellow and the angel answered and said to him you don't understand now I'm kind of paraphrasing you don't understand Zacharias I'm Gabriel I'm Gabriel who stands in the presence of

God and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings translation how could you dare not believe me but behold you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place as you want to prove here it is because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time now notice God not only supernaturally accomplished his plan in spite of Zacharias fears and unbelief really when you read the rest of the story he turned those things into faith and God gracious turned those things into faith and how do we know that well Zacharias finished out his duty as priest there without any more fits of fear apparently I'm not sure I would want to soon go back into that place after having seen this supernatural creature

Zacharias went on and performed his duty he remained faithful and then also Zacharias this is implied obviously Zacharias went home and he had physical relations with his wife he believed God God turned all of that fear and faithlessness into faith the supernatural power of God he's able to work his plan in spite of Zacharias spiritual hindrances his shortcomings But he's also able to work his plan in spite of Elizabeth's physical hindrances verse 7 tells us that they had no children why? Because Elizabeth was barren she was sterile and they were both well advanced in years now all her married life Elizabeth carried around with her the cultural even religious stigma of barrenness something that's difficult for us to understand today though I think some women would understand it but culturally and religiously the stigma is not necessarily here today as it was in Elizabeth's day and she carried that around with her all of her married life and she was well advanced in years so she had bore this burden for many many years and now God because of her faithfulness is about to reward her in spite of her sterility in spite of her past being past the childbearing age two major obstacles

[45 : 45] In spite of that God is going to work his plan and by the way it's interesting that Gabriel makes a reference to this during his visit to Mary in chapter 1 verse 36 for example he says now indeed Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren for with God nothing will be impossible by the way why was Gabriel saying this to Mary that she's a virgin and she's going to have a child and Mary is wondering how can this happen and so what does God do he through the angel Gabriel puts Elizabeth's pregnancy on the same par with Mary's pregnancy and so therefore both are equal miracles interesting now I need to wrap this up we're preparing our heads and hearts for Christmas and we're doing so by embracing three marvelous realities revealed in

God's preparation of his choice saints here in Luke chapter 1 and these realities are again that God tells us what he's going to do before he does it and nothing and no one can change it the sovereign plan of God and God is able to accomplish all that he purposes to do and nothing is impossible for him his supernatural power and then third the saving purpose of God this is what it all comes down to this is what this is all for the saving purpose of God God is not simply putting on a show here by granting this woman well advanced in years this sterile woman a child and later he's not just simply putting on a show by putting a child inside the womb of a virgin God is not trying to impress us with his power this is all a part of his redemptive purpose this is all a part of his saving purpose now we have

Luke declaring this over and over in this chapter but since our focus is Zacharias and Elizabeth let's see his saving purpose the saving purpose of God declared openly declared by Zacharias and that leads us to verse 58 would you look at that 59 rather so it was and that by the way is a testimony to God's sovereign plan what he says he's going to do he does do and so it was on the eighth day that they came to circumcise the child this is John the Baptist and they would have called him by the name of his father Zacharias which would have been customary by the way and his mother

answered and said no he should be called John but they said to her there is no one among your relatives who is called by this name so they made signs to the father by the way Zacharias has now been mute for over nine months and so he made signs to the father what would have him what he would have him called and he asked for a writing tablet and wrote saying his name is John and so they all marveled immediately his mouth was open and his tongue loosed and he spoke praising God now God made him dumb because of his unbelief and now he's loosening his tongue so that he can declare God's purpose in all of this and he does so let me skip on to verse 67 and by the way we'll come back and look at this in more detail after Christmas when we consider John the Baptist verse 67 now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied saying and this prophecy by the way is all concerning not his son

John but the son of God the Lord Jesus Christ here's his prophecy blessed is the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David this is Jesus he's speaking of and Jesus hasn't even been born yet this is a prophecy and as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets who have been since the world began God has been announcing this all throughout the Old Testament remember God announces what he's going to do before he does it that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant the oath which he swore to our father

[51:19] Abraham remember Zacharias means God remembers Elizabeth means God's oath to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant the oath which he swore to our father Abraham to grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life and you child will be called the prophet of the highest now he's speaking of John for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God which with the day spring from on high has visited us that's Jesus the day spring from on high has visited us to give light to those who sit in darkness darkness and the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace let me repeat that in closing this is the saving purpose of God

God not only announces what he's going to do before he does and not only does God have the power to do it as he said he would but all of it is for a purpose and it's his divine purpose his saving purpose and here's the clear statement of it the day spring from on high that's Jesus has visited us to do what to give light to give light to those who sit in darkness spiritual darkness and to give light to those who are sitting in the shadow of death that's eternal a statement about the eternal condemnation of a holy God this is a light to those who are in darkness who are in the shadow of death to guide our feet to lead us in the way of what peace peace peace with God reconciliation with our creator

God's saving purpose amen and amen peace peace