

The setting of this jewel will cause us to marvel at its beauty. In verse 5, we are told that Zechariah was a priest who married a daughter of a priest. This was considered a rare and wonderful circumstance for a priest. They were both exceptionally devoted to God. You can imagine the wonderful future many anticipated for this good and godly couple. I'm sure the wedding toast included a blessing for them to have many children, and may one of those sons be the promised Messiah sent to set God's people free.

That was the dream of all newlyweds in Israel. Every Jewish bride was taught to have a large family because the next son might be the Messiah, the heaven-sent Deliverer of Israel. If there was any couple that seemed qualified to be human instruments of that promise, it was Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Verse 7 states the facts plain and without emotion, but make no mistake it is filled with pain. They had no children because Elizabeth was barren. If you can think of a cultural and family issue that our society interprets as God having forgotten you or even punishing you, then you will know something of how Zechariah and Elizabeth felt. If you've ever longed for something but had your desire become despair and your despair become hopelessness and your hopelessness become reluctant acceptance, then you know what went on in this couple's heart.

A great privilege comes to this card-carrying member of the AARP. He is selected for temple duty. There were so many priests that they drew lots to determine who got to serve on temple duty. Zechariah not only got temple duty, but he was assigned to offer incense, which was an once-in-a-lifetime privilege. If you were selected then your name was removed from future contention so that others would have the privilege. He offered this incense in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies, and that was just once a year. The Jewish tradition described the priest who gets to offer this incense as "rich and holy" for the rest of his life.

It is here that Zechariah encounters the angel and the news that his elderly wife will conceive. She will give birth to the forerunner of the Messiah. Even though the angel has come directly from the presence of God, and there are several Biblical precedents for aged women giving birth to sons, Zechariah doubts God can do this. The angel assures him it will happen and as a sign to prove this miracle, Zechariah will not be able to speak until the boy is born. It would be better for Zechariah to say nothing than to give a false message about God's plan of salvation.

After hearing this story, one man said to his pastor as he left the service that his wife must be pregnant. The pastor looked confused. He explained that she hadn't heard a word he'd spoken in a long time.

The next time Zechariah speaks it is to name his son John just as the angel had instructed. As he held that little baby boy in his arms, he broke forth in a song of praise to God. The hymn can be divided into two parts. The first part is praise to God (v. 68-75). The second part is the prophet of God (v. 76-79). Each line of this magnificent song celebrates that God has at long last come to redeem his people.

Christmas is about praising God and proclaiming the Savior has come at last.

Great music has always been associated with Christmas. Songs come and go; but there are four songs of Christmas that have endured for 2,000 years. As we celebrate Advent let's look at one each week. We are to ...

1. Be Ruled by the Word of God.

John is called a prophet in verse 76. What is a prophet? A prophet has been described as a forth teller and a foreteller. A foreteller is someone who predicts future events. The prophet's message often involved describing future events that God was

going to bring to pass. In fact, according to Deuteronomy 13, a future event coming true determined whether the prophet was from God or not. This foretelling is seen in verses 67-75. Prophets foretold another Redeemer like Moses would come and lead the people in an exodus out of bondage into freedom. He would be a very powerful descendent of David that would defeat our enemies and show mercy to believers.

But the prophet was mostly known for being one who plainly, clearly told the people God's message. He was a forth teller. This would be John's role. He would plainly tell the people that God's Deliverer had arrived, and they were to prepare their hearts to receive him by repenting of sin. He will teach them about salvation and the way to peace with God.

One cause for Zechariah's praise is that finally, after 400 years of silence, a prophet of God is heard speaking the Word of God. In Luke 7 Jesus said that forth telling was the outstanding characteristic of John. He asked the people why they went out into the desert to hear John? Did they go because they thought he was a reed? A reed sways back and forth depending on which way the wind was blowing. Is that the way they thought of John? Did they think he had no backbone? Did they think he preached whatever was popular with the people? No, he preached God's Word.

Did they go thinking that he would be dressed in the robes of royalty and privilege? Did they think he was a dandy, someone who was soft and gives in to his own selfish desires? No. They went because he was a prophet who lived God's Word. He was a man who was dominated neither by popular opinion or his own selfish desires, but whose mind and conscience the Word of God ruled.

What's true of your physical heart is true of your spiritual heart. We sing occasionally, "Change my heart, oh God, make it ever true. Change my heart, oh God, may I be like You." It takes more than singing a song. It requires the hard work of challenging our bad habits and false attitudes and supplementing them with holy behavior and truthful thinking. It takes some new habits.

John the Baptist was a man whose mind and conscious and lifestyle were dominated by the Word of God. It explains why his message and life was so different than most of his generation. Our thoughts and values are so permeated by our culture that we are blind to how powerfully it molds us into its image. If we have any hope of living in a way that's pleasing to God, we have to have some thing outside of our culture that speaks to us the truth. That objective truth is the Word of God.

We tend to be selfish. It is the Word of God that rattles our cage and challenges us to be generous. We tend to be fleshly and carnal. It is the Word of God that calls us to holiness and righteousness toward God and man. We tend to only think of temporal matters, but it is the Word of God that causes us to live with eternity in view.

When you tell the life story of John the Baptist, it is the story of a man in whom God's opinion dominated his life. If we were to tell your story, and one day people will tell your story, what will they say was the opinion that ruled your life?

If Christmas is about praising God and proclaiming the Savior has come, then how did John the Baptist to do this? He praised God and proclaimed Jesus as the long expected Savior by being ruled by the Word of God.

2. Reveal the Son of God.

In v. 76b it says...

John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. Those verses describe the forerunner who will announce the coming of the Messiah. Malachi 4:5 said he would be an Elijah-like prophet. Elijah was the powerful prophet that called his generation to repent and turn to God. The role of the forerunner was to prepare the people for the Messiah. This is the way John viewed himself.

In John 3:27-30, John the Baptist is responding to his disciples who inform him that everyone is going to Jesus to be baptized instead of John. John says that's what is supposed to happen. He compares himself to the best man at a wedding, and Jesus is the groomsman. The best man's job is to see that the groom and bride are married and then get out of the way as they go on their honeymoon. John said this was his job. He closes that paragraph by saying that Jesus must increase and he must decrease. That is exactly what John did. He faded out of the picture and Jesus was left standing at the center of the stage. John's life was all about Jesus.

Ravi Zacharias tells this story. When it comes to Christmas and family you will be able to identify with what he says:

Some years ago, we were spending Christmas in the home of my wife's parents. It was not a happy day in the household. Much had gone wrong during the preceding weeks, and a weight of sadness hung over the home. Yet, in the midst of all that, my mother-in-law kept her routine habit of asking people who would likely have no place to go at Christmas to share Christmas dinner with us.

That year she invited a man who was, by everyone's estimate, somewhat of an odd person, quite eccentric in his demeanor. Not much was known about him at the church except that he came regularly, sat alone, and left without much conversation. He obviously lived alone and was quite a sorry-looking, solitary figure. He was our Christmas guest.

Because of other happenings in the house, not the least of which was that one daughter was taken to the hospital for the birth of her first child. Everything was in confusion. All of our emotions were on edge. It fell upon me, in turn, to entertain this gentleman. I must confess that I did not appreciate it. Owing to a heavy life of travel year-round, I have jealously guarded my Christmases as time to be with my family. This was not going to be such a privilege, and I was not happy. As I sat in the living room, entertaining him while others were busy, I thought to myself, "This is going to go down as one of the most miserable Christmases of my life."

But somehow we got through the evening. He evidently loved the meal, the fire crackling in the background, the snow outside, the Christmas carols playing, and a rather weighty theological discussion in which he and I were engaged--at his instigation, I might add. He was a very well read man and, as I found out, loved to grapple with heavy theological themes. I do too, but frankly, not during an evening that has been set aside to enjoy life's quiet moments.

At the end of the night when he bade us all good-bye, he reached out and took the hand of each of us, one by one, and said, "Thank you for the best Christmas of my life. I will never forget it." He walked out into the dark, snowy night, back into his solitary existence.

My heart sank in self-indictment at those tender words of his. I had to draw on every nerve in my being to keep from breaking down with tears. Just a few short years later, relatively young, and therefore to our surprise, he passed away. I have relived that Christmas many times in my memory.

That year the Lord taught me a lesson. The primary purpose of a home is to reflect and to distribute the love of Christ. Anything that usurps that is idolatrous. Having been lifted beyond the prejudice of culture, Jesus repositioned the place of wealth for his disciples. So staggering was the impact that many of them in the years to come would leave their own homes to go to distant parts of the world in order to proclaim the heaven-sent message that redefined their earthly homes. Eleven of them paid for that message with their lives.

Rick Warren's famous first line in his book *The Purpose Driven Life* applies here. It's not about you. It's about Him.

If Christmas is about praising God and proclaiming the Savior has come, then how did John the Baptist to do this? He praised God and proclaimed Jesus as the long expected Savior by being ruled by the Word of God and by revealing the Son of God.

3. Retell the Story of Salvation.

This song is retelling the story of salvation. The picture of the Exodus is found in the words of verse 68. We are told in verse 69 that the one who saves us is powerful enough to accomplish the task. This salvation will rescue us from our enemies. This has a spiritual application as well as physical. The God who saves us is full of mercy. This explains why He wants to save us (v. 72). His salvation changes us. We become holy and righteous toward God and people (v. 75). We are to give people this message (v. 77). This heavenly being has arrived and reveals to us the pathway that leads to peace with God (v. 78b-79). John is called to tell the story of salvation. John is to be a herald of salvation.

There are two words that summarize Christmas. First, sin. We are sinners. We are fundamentally self-centered people. We regularly dethrone God and enthrone ourselves. This self-assertion against the eternal God who fills the universe earns His wrath, indignation, and judgment. It is the greatest act of arrogance in the universe.

The second word is salvation. The word means freedom from God's wrath and judgment. Christmas is the story of Him remembering his plan to free us from our just damnation. He achieves this by entering our world, taking our place, and dying our death. This is the most needed message of mankind on the earth today.

While thinking about preaching a series of Christmas messages one more time, I looked for something that would be different and new. We're so familiar with these events that we're tempted to be ho-hum about them. But it occurred to me that Christmas is really a time of year for retelling old and familiar stories. For example, at some point you will find time to again watch *It's a Wonderful Life*. You'll have your children watch the Charlie Brown special about that pathetic little Christmas tree and Linus will quote Luke 2. TV will rerun Dickens *A Christmas Carol*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *The Christmas Story* with the caution not to shoot your eye out. Even many sub par movies will be shown again because they all have a Christmas theme. Why do we do this?

May I suggest they all carry the seed of salvation. Whether it's Scrooge being rescued from his shriveled, greedy life or George Bailey being shown the abundance of his blessings or a little Natalie Wood having her faith in Santa Claus restored, we all desire to be set free from that which binds us.

Even the retailers that require "Christmas" to be substituted with "holiday" can't keep from telling the good news of Jesus Christ's coming; for what is "holiday" but "holy day!" Why do we need a holy day? We are sinners. What makes it a holy day? We have a Savior.

This season ask God to show you the dozens and dozens of ways you can tell the story of salvation. This is the way we can praise God and proclaim the Savior has come. John the Baptist did this by being ruled by the Word of God, revealing the Son of God, and retelling the story of salvation.

Conclusion:

An Australian mining town will always remember the year of the dramatic rescue. An earthquake killed one miner and trapped two others 3,000 feet under the ground. Days turned into weeks as miners bore through tons of rock; rescuers could only work one at a time on their backs in a cramped rescue tunnel, using hand-held tools to

avoid caving. They dug through rock five times harder than cement. Five days after the accident the two trapped miners heard the sounds of the rescuers. Six days later a small crack was made and food and hope was passed to trapped men. Fourteen days after the accident, over 300 hours of waiting for rescue, the two miners were freed. Bill Shorten, national secretary of the Australian Workers Union, said, "This is the biggest escape from the biggest prison."

Four hundred years people waited to hear from God. Now he has spoken. A rescue plan has been implemented and successfully rescued people in the most binding of prisons, their sin. Do you hear the Lord knocking? That's the sound of deliverance. Come to Christ right now.

Make Your Escape Today!

Martyrs for Christ

This past Sunday many of us were stirred by the words a young pastor in Zimbabwe, Africa, delivered before he was martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ. He said:

I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have the Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line.

The decision has been made—I'm a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, cheap giving and dwarfed goals. I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean in His presence, walk by patience, am uplifted by prayer and I labor with power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions are few, my Guide reliable my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the enemy, pander at the pool of popularity or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, shut up, or let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach with my all now and work till He stops me. And, when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing me...my banner will be clear!

In the year 155 A.D., Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna was arrested. The proconsul tried to persuade him to recant and save himself. Surely given his advanced age it would be better for him to avoid torture and death. All he had to do was worship the emperor. Why be so stubborn? The bishop answered, "For eighty-six years I have served Christ, and he has done me no evil. How could I curse my king, who saved me?" He was burned at the stake. If someone denied Christ, the authorities could use that to weaken the faith of others. At the same time, for every believer that did not deny Christ but faced death instead, many others would come to faith.

Writing in Carthage toward the close of the second century, a church theologian named Tertullian put it this way: "The more you mow us down, the more in numbers we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."

My heart's prayer is that each one of us would take up the banner of that martyred saint. May those words burn in our hearts. May we become gripped with the mission of getting the message of Christ to those without Him and without hope. May the winning and discipleship of people for whom Christ died be our heart's desire.

God Bless You!
Bro. Allan

Opportunities For Service

Living out Your Spiritual Commitment . . . and Fulfilling Christ's Divine Plan

Sunday, December 3, 2017

Choir Rehearsal..... 9:00 am

Sunday School 9:15 am

Morning Worship.....10:30 am

Nursery: Volunteers as needed

Ushers: John Lewis, Gary Yarbrough, Joseph Coats, ? ? ?

Alternate: Larry McKahan

Evening Worship.....6:30 pm

Monday, December 4

Food Kitchen

Wednesday, December 6

Prayer / Bible Study6:30 pm

No Worship Team

Sunday, December 10, 2017

Choir Rehearsal.....9:00 am

Sunday School.....9:15 am

Morning Worship.....10:30 am

Nursery: Volunteers as needed

Ushers: Larry McKahan, Bill Schottel, Kirkpatrick, ? ? ?

Alternate: Ken Nice

Christmas Tea with the Lanes

2-4 pm

No Evening Worship.....

Wednesday, December 13

Prayer Warriors 10:00 am

Prayer / Bible Study.... 6:30 pm

Worship Team 7:30 pm

Saturday, December 16 Church-wide Caroling..... 6:30 pm

Up-Coming Events.....

December 3-10 — Week of Prayer for International Missions

December 4 — Food Kitchen 5:30 pm

December 13 — Prayer Warriors

December 10 — Christmas Tea with the Lanes

December 16 — Church-wide Caroling, 5 pm

December 25 — Christmas

GROW Team

Commit to **GROW!** **Everyone make a contact!** Invite someone to Bible Study and Worship this week. ☺

Sunday Nights

We will meet tonight,

Sunday, December 3. Come be a part of a special emphasis.

Wednesday Night Prayer and Bible Study

Come pray for the direction of our church. Also, we will begin a new study. Please plan to attend and pray at 6:30 pm.

Food Kitchen

We will be serving Monday, December 4, at 5:30 pm. Please feel free to join us as we show the love of Christ and minister to those in need.

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

This month we will emphasize this offering for International Missions. Our church goal is \$1,700.00.

CHRISTMAS TEA WITH THE LANES

December 10

2—4 pm

You are invited to enjoy an afternoon of Christmas Fellowship at the parsonage. Plan to come and relax for a moment during the busy holiday season. We're looking forward to seeing you!

CHRISTMAS CARD BOXES IN THE HALLWAY

You may exchange Christmas Cards among your church family by placing your cards in the boxes in the hallway. Then contribute the postage you save to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering!

For the Record-

Attendance: November 26, 2017

Sunday School.....	29
Visitors.....	5
Total.....	34
Contacts Made.....	9
Morning Worship.....	42
Children's Worship.....	14
Sunday Night	N/A
Wednesday Night	??

Financial Record:

Weekly Budget	\$ 2,040.52
Offering Received ...	\$ 1,954.90
Lottie Moon.....	\$ 160.00
Long Family-Nov.....	\$ 181.00

Offering Received by Mail:

December Counting Team:

Don Beavers and Jordan Lane

December Van Driver:

Mike Green

Remember to call 232-3747
before 8 am if you need a ride.

December Member Birthdays:

03 ... Brent Fortune
08 ... Madeline Swink
09 ... Allison Adkinson
11 ... George Ferbert
15 ... George Burgess
16 ... Addison Leichti
16 ... Doris Richardson
19 ... Jessica Kirkpatrick
20 ... Leona Reynolds
20 ... Brenda Burgess
23 ... Joseph Coats

December Anniversaries

Bill and Alva Lou Schottel
December 22, 1962

Prayer Requests ...

Brigida Winans—heel surgery
Mike Green—knee recovery
Arlette Duty—carpal tunnel

Gina Harr—surgery recovery
Joe Coats—pacemaker
Don Beavers—heart and health
Van Meter family
Curtis Conard—recovery
Emily Jones & baby
Gary & Peggy Fewins and family
Chad Bradford—heart surgery
Cynthia Burdick—cancer recovery
Karissa and Matt Long and family
The Waters Family—guidance
Stephanie & Jason Terpack
Shawna Hughes—home isolation
Gary and Sharon Yarbrough
Larry Danner—cancer
Rosella Davis—Flo Conard's sister
Mary Sharp's brother-in-law Jim
Bill Clinton—Don and Mae's son
Troy Griswold—cancer treatment
Lisa Bowers—Jack and Flo's daughter
LoLeta Middleton—strength
Elvera's daughter & daughter-in-law
Zella Davis —Doris Richardson's sister
Rev. A. B. Brown Betty Campbell
George Ferbert Kevin Duty
Ellen Blanton Lois Ulmer
Jim Winans Nellie Reynolds
Madeline Swink Ann Riddle
Kathryn Beavers Keon McKahan
Louanne Laurence Leona Reynolds
Jozy Winans Kenny Duty
Pat Means Buddy Means
Bill & Juanita Debbie Sands
Pat Puckett Judy Anderson
Brenda Burgess Roscoe Lane
Carolyn Houts Tim Izer
Nickolay Nazaruk, Peski 2 Church
David and Deborah Grace
Our Nation and Leaders
Our Military Service people
Today's Prayer Requests ...

Our Nation and our Leaders ...

Five More New Families...
