

# CHAPTER 1

The narrative which this evangelist gives us (or rather God by him) of the life of Christ begins earlier than either Matthew or Mark. We have reason to thank God for them all, as we have for all the gifts and graces of Christ's ministers, which in one make up what is wanting in the other, while all put together make a harmony. In this chapter we have,

- I.** Luke's preface to his gospel, or his epistle dedicatory to his friend Theophilus (v. 1-4).
- II.** The prophecy and history of the conception of John Baptist, who was Christ's forerunner (v. 5-25). The annunciation of the virgin Mary, or the notice given to her that she should be the mother of the Messiah (v. 26-38).
- IV.** The interview between Mary the mother of Jesus and Elisabeth the mother of John, when they were both with child of those pregnant births, and the prophecies they both uttered upon that occasion (v. 39-56).
- V.** The birth and circumcision of John Baptist, six months before the birth of Christ (v. 57-66).
- VI.** Zacharias's song of praise, in thankfulness for the birth of John, and in prospect of the birth of Jesus (v. 67-79).
- VII.** A short account of John Baptist's infancy (v. 80). And these do more than give us an entertaining narrative; they will lead us into the understanding of the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.

## LUKE 1:1-4

### THE EVANGELIST'S PREFACE

Complimental prefaces and dedications, the language of flattery and the food and fuel of pride, are justly condemned by the wise and good; but it doth not therefore follow, that such as are useful and instructive are to be run down; such is this, in which St. Luke dedicates his gospel to his friend Theophilus, not as to his *patron*, though he was a man of honour, to

protect it, but as to his *pupil*, to learn it, and hold it fast. It is not certain who this Theophilus was; the name signifies a *friend of God*; some think that it does not mean any particular person, but every one that is a *lover of God*; Dr. Hammond quotes some of the ancients understanding it so: and then it teaches us, that those who are truly lovers of God, will heartily welcome the gospel of Christ, the design and tendency of which are, to bring us to God. But it is rather to be understood of some particular person, probably a magistrate; because Luke gives him here the same title of respect which St. Paul gave to Festus the governor, *kratiste* (<sup>405</sup>Acts 26:25), which we there translate *most noble Festus*, and here *most excellent Theophilus*. Note, Religion does not destroy civility and good manners, but teaches us, according to the usages of our country, to *give honour to them to whom honour is due*.

Now observe here,

**I.** Why St. Luke wrote this gospel. It is certain that he was moved by the Holy Ghost, not only *to* the writing, but *in* the writing of it; but in both he was moved as a reasonable creature, and not as a mere machine; and he was made to consider,

**1.** That the things he wrote of were things that were *most surely believed among all Christians*, and therefore things which they ought to be instructed in, that they may know what they believe, and things which ought to be transmitted to posterity (who are as much concerned in them as we are); and, in order to that, to be committed to writing, which is the surest way of conveyance to the ages to come. He will not write about things of *doubtful disputation*, things about which Christians may safely differ from one another and hesitate within themselves; but the things which are, and ought to be, most *surely believed*, *pragmata peplerophoremena* — *the things which were performed* (so some), which Christ and his apostles did, and did with such circumstances as gave a full assurance that they were really done, so that they have gained an established lasting credit. Note, Though it is not the foundation of our faith, yet it is a support to it, that the articles of our creed are things that have been long *most surely believed*. The doctrine of Christ is what thousands of the wisest and best of men have *ventured their souls upon* with the greatest assurance and satisfaction.

2. That it was requisite there should be a *declaration made in order* of those things; that the history of the life of Christ should be *methodized*, and committed to writing, for the greater certainty of the conveyance. When things are *put in order*, we know the better where to *find them* for *our own* use, and how to *keep* them for the benefit of *others*.

3. That there were *many who had undertaken* to *publish* narratives of the *life of Christ*, many well-meaning people, who *designed* well, and *did* well, and what they published had *done good*, though not done by divine inspiration, nor so well done as might be, nor intended for perpetuity.  
Note,

(1.) The labours of others in the gospel of Christ, if faithful and honest, we ought to *commend* and *encourage*, and not to *despise*, though chargeable with many deficiencies.

(2.) Others' services to Christ must not be reckoned to supersede ours, but rather to quicken them.

4. That the truth of the things he had to write was *confirmed* by the *concurring testimony* of those who were competent and unexceptionable witnesses of them; what had been published in writing already, and what he was now about to publish, agreed with that which had been delivered by word of mouth, over and over, by those who from the beginning were *eye-witnesses and ministers of the word*, v. 2. Note,

(1.) The apostles were *ministers of the word* of Christ, who is *the Word* (so some understand it), or of the doctrine of Christ; they, having received it themselves, ministered it to others, <sup><401></sup>1 John 1:1. They had not a gospel to make as masters, but a gospel to preach as ministers.

(2.) The *ministers of the word* were *eye-witnesses* of the things which they preached, and, which is also included, *ear-witnesses*. They did themselves *hear* the doctrine of Christ, and *see* his miracles, and had them not by report, at second hand; and therefore they could not but speak, with the greatest assurance, the things which they had *seen and heard*, <sup><402></sup>Acts 4:20.

(3.) They were so *from the beginning* of Christ's ministry, v. 2. He had his disciples with him when he wrought his *first miracle*, <sup><403></sup>John 2:11. They *companied with him all the time he went in and out among them* (<sup><404></sup>Acts 1:21), so that they not only heard and saw all that which was sufficient to

confirm their faith, but, if there had been any thing to shock it, they had opportunity to discover it.

(4.) The *written* gospel, which we have to *this day*, exactly agrees with the gospel which was *preached* in the *first days* of the church.

(5.) That he himself had a *perfect understanding* of the *things* he wrote of, *from the first*, v. 3. Some think that here is a tacit reflection upon those who had written before him, that they had not a *perfect understanding* of what they wrote, and therefore, *Here am I, send me* ( — *facit indignatio versum* — *my wrath impels my pen*); or rather, without reflecting on them, he asserts his own ability for this undertaking: “It seemed good to me, having attained to the exact knowledge of all things, *another* — *from above*;” so I think it should be rendered; for if he meant the same with *from the beginning* (v. 2), as our translation intimates, he would have used the same word.

[1.] He had diligently *searched* into these things, had *followed* after them (so the word is), as the Old-Testament prophets are said to have *enquired* and *searched diligently*, <sup>1</sup>1 Peter 1:10. He had not taken things so easily and superficially as others who had written before him, but made it his business to inform himself concerning particulars.

[2.] He had received his intelligence, not only by tradition, as others had done, but by revelation, confirming that tradition, and securing him from any error or mistake in the recording of it. He sought it *from above* (so the word intimates), and from thence he had it; thus, like Elihu, he *fetches his knowledge* from afar. He wrote his history as Moses wrote his, of things *reported* by tradition, but *ratified* by inspiration.

[3.] He could therefore say that he had a *perfect understanding* of these things. He knew them, *akribos* — *accurately*, exactly. “Now, having received this *from above*, it seemed good to me to communicate it;” for such a talent as this ought not to be buried.

II. Observe why he sent it to *Theophilus*: “I wrote unto thee these things *in order*, not that thou mayest give reputation to the work, but that thou mayest be edified by it (v. 4); *that thou mayest know the certainty of those things wherein thou has been instructed*.”

1. It is implied, that he had been *instructed* in these things either before his baptism, or since, or both, according to the rule, <sup>1</sup>Matthew 28:19, 20.

Probably, Luke had baptized him, and knew how well instructed he was; *peri hon katechetes* — concerning which thou hast been catechized; so the word is; the most knowing Christians began with being catechized. Theophilus was a person of quality, perhaps of noble birth; and so much the more pains should be taken with such when they are young, to teach them the principles of the oracles of God, that they may be fortified against temptations, and furnished for the opportunities, of a high condition in the world.

2. It was intended that he should *know the certainty of those things*, should understand them more clearly and believe more firmly. There is a *certainty* in the gospel of Christ, there is that therein which we may build upon; and those who have been well instructed in the things of God when they were young should afterwards give diligence to *know the certainty* of those things, to know not only what we believe, but why we believe it, that we may be able to give a *reason of the hope that is in us*.

## LUKE 1:5-25

### THE APPEARANCE OF AN ANGEL TO ZACHARIAS

The two preceding evangelists had agreed to begin the gospel with the baptism of John and his ministry, which commenced about six months before our Saviour's public ministry (and now, things being near a crisis, six months was *a deal* of time, which before was but *a little*), and therefore this evangelist, designing to give a more particular account than had been given of our Saviour's conception and birth, determines to do so of John Baptist, who in both was his harbinger and forerunner, the morning-star to the Sun of righteousness. The evangelist determines thus, not only because it is commonly reckoned a satisfaction and entertainment to know something of the original extraction and early days of those who afterwards prove great men, but because in the beginning of these there were many things miraculous, and presages of what they afterwards proved. In these verses our inspired historian begins as early as the conception of John Baptist. Now observe here,

I. The account given of *his parents* (v. 5): They lived *in the days of Herod the king*, who was a foreigner, and a deputy for the Romans, who had lately made Judea a province of the empire. This is taken notice of to show

that the sceptre was quite departed from Judah, and therefore that now was the time for Shiloh to come, according to Jacob's prophecy, <sup><0100></sup>Genesis 49:10. The family of David was now sunk, when it was to rise, and flourish again, in the Messiah. Note, None ought to despair of the reviving and flourishing of religion, even when civil liberties are lost. Israel enslaved, yet then comes the glory of Israel.

Now the father of John Baptist was a priest, a son of Aaron; his name *Zacharias*. No families in the world were ever so honoured of God as those of Aaron and David; with one was made the covenant of priesthood, with the other that of royalty; they had both forfeited their honour, yet the gospel again puts honour upon both in their latter days, on that of Aaron in John Baptist, on that of David in Christ, and then they were both extinguished and lost. Christ was of David's house, his forerunner of Aaron's; for his priestly agency and influence opened the way to his kingly authority and dignity. This Zacharias was *of the course of Abia*. When in David's time the family of Aaron was multiplied, he divided them into twenty-four courses, for the more regular performances of their office, that it might never be either *neglected* for want of hands or *engrossed* by a few. The eighth of those was that of *Abia* (<sup><0100></sup>1 Chronicles 24:10), who was descended from Eleazar, Aaron's eldest son; but Dr. Lightfoot suggests that many of the families of the priests were lost in the captivity, so that after their return they took in those of other families, retaining the names of the heads of the respective courses. The wife of this Zacharias was of the daughters of Aaron too, and her name was *Elisabeth*, the very same name with *Elisheba* the wife of Aaron, <sup><0100></sup>Exodus 6:23. The priests (Josephus saith) was very careful to marry within their own family, that they might maintain the dignity of the priesthood and keep it without mixture.

Now that which is observed concerning Zacharias and Elisabeth is,

**1.** That they were a very religious couple (v. 6): *They were both righteous before God*; they were so in his sight whose judgment, we are sure, is *according to truth*; they were sincerely and really so. They are righteous indeed that are so *before God*, as Noah in his generation, <sup><0100></sup>Genesis 7:1. They *approved themselves to him*, and he was graciously pleased to accept them. It is a happy thing when those who are joined to each other in marriage are both *joined to the Lord*; and it is especially requisite that the priests, the Lord's ministers, should with their yoke-fellows be *righteous*

before God, that they may be *examples to the flock*, and rejoice their hearts. *They walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.*

(1.) Their being *righteous before God* was evidenced by the course and tenour of their conversations; they showed it, not by their talk, but by their *works*; by the way they walked in and the rule they walked by.

(2.) They were *of a piece* with themselves; for their devotions and their conversations agreed. They walked not only in the *ordinances* of the Lord, which related to divine worship, but in the *commandments* of the Lord, which have reference to all the instances of a good conversation, and must be regarded.

(3.) They were universal in their obedience; not that they never did in any thing *come short* of their duty, but it was their constant care and endeavor to *come up* to it.

(4.) Herein, though they were not *sinless*, yet they were *blameless*; nobody could charge them with any open scandalous sin; they lived *honestly* and *inoffensively*, as ministers and their families are in a special manner concerned to do, that the ministry be not blamed in *their* blame.

2. That they had been long *childless*, v. 7. Children are a *heritage of the Lord*. But there are many of his heirs in a married state, that yet are denied this *heritage*; they are valuable desirable blessings; yet many there are, who are *righteous before God*, and, if they had children, would bring them up in his fear, who yet are not thus blessed, while the *men of this world* are *full of children* (<sup><974></sup>Psalm 17:14), *and send forth their little ones like a flock*, (<sup><911></sup>Job 21:11. Elisabeth was *barren*, and they began to despair of ever having children, for they were both now *well stricken in years*, when the women that have been most fruitful *leave off bearing*. Many eminent persons were born of mothers that had been long childless, as Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, and so here John Baptist, to make their birth the more remarkable and the blessing of it the more valuable to their parents, and to show that when God keeps his people long waiting for mercy he sometimes is pleased to recompense them for their patience by *doubling* the worth of it when it comes.

II. The appearing of an angel to his father Zacharias, as he was ministering in the temple, v. 8-11. Zechariah the prophet was the last of

the Old Testament that was conversant with angels, and Zacharias the priest the first in the New Testament. Observe,

**1.** How Zacharias was employed in the service of God (v. 8): He *executed the priest's office, before God, in the order of his course; it was his week of waiting, and he was upon duty.* Though his family was not built up, or made to grow, yet he made conscience of doing the work of his own place and day. Though we have not *desired mercies*, yet we must keep close to *enjoined services*; and, in our diligent and constant attendance on them, we may hope that mercy and comfort will come at last. Now it fell to Zacharias's lot to burn incense morning and evening for that week of his waiting, as other services fell to other priests *by lot* likewise. The services were directed by lot, that some might not decline them and others engross them, and that, the *disposal of the lot being from the Lord*, they might have the satisfaction of a divine call to the work. This was not the high priest burning incense on the day of atonement, as some have fondly imagined, who have thought by that to find out the time of our Saviour's birth; but it is plain that it was the burning of the daily incense at the *altar of incense* (v. 11), which was *in the temple* (v. 9), not in the most holy place, into which the high priest entered. The Jews say that one and the same priest burned not incense twice in all his days (there were such a multitude of them), at least never more than one week. It is very probable that this was *upon the sabbath day*, because there was a *multitude of people* attending (v. 10), which ordinarily was not on a week day; and thus God usually puts honour upon *his own day*. And then if Dr. Lightfoot reckon, with the help of the Jewish calender, that this course of Abia fell on the seventeenth day of the third month, the month Sivan, answering to part of May and part of June, it is worth observing that the portions of the law and the prophets which were read this day in synagogues were very agreeable to that which was doing in the temple; namely, the law of the Nazarites (Numbers 6), and the conception of Samson, Judges 13.

While Zacharias was burning incense in the temple, *the whole multitude of the people were praying without*, v. 10. Dr. Lightfoot says that there were constantly in the temple, at the hour of prayer, the priests of the course that then served, and, if it were the sabbath day, those of that course also that had been in waiting the week before, and the Levites that served under the priests, and the *men of the station*, as the Rabbin call them, who were the representatives of the people, in putting their hands upon the head of the sacrifices, and many besides, who, moved by devotion, left their



employments, for that time, to be present at the service of God; and those would make up *a great multitude*, especially on sabbaths and feast-days: now these all addressed themselves to their devotions (in mental prayer, for their voice was not heard), when by the tinkling of a bell they had notice that the priest was gone in to burn incense. Now observe here,

(1.) That the true Israel of God always were a *praying* people; and prayer is the great and principal piece of service by which we give honour to God, fetch in favours from him, and keep up our communion with him.

(2.) That *then*, when ritual and ceremonial appointments were in full force, as this of *burning incense*, yet moral and spiritual duties were required to go along with them, and were principally looked at. David knew that when he was at a distance from the altar his prayer might be heard *without incense*, for it might be directed before God *as incense*, ~~HEB~~ Psalm 141:2. But, when he was *compassing the altar*, the incense could not be accepted *without prayer*, any more than the shell without the kernel.

(3.) That is not enough for us to be where God is worshipped, if our hearts do not join in the worship, and go along with the minister, in all the parts of it. If he burn the incense ever so well, in the most pertinent, judicious, lively prayer, if we be not at the same time *praying* in concurrence with him, what will it avail us?

(4.) All the prayers we offer up to God here in his courts are acceptable and successful only in virtue of the incense of Christ's intercession in the temple of God above. To this usage in the temple-service there seems to be an allusion (~~ROM~~ Revelation 8:1, 3, 4), where we find that *there was silence in heaven*, as there was in the temple, *for half an hour*, while the people were *silently* lifting up their hearts to God in prayer; and that there was an *angel*, the angel of the covenant, who offered up *much incense with the prayers of all saints before the throne*. We cannot expect an interest in Christ's intercession if we do not *pray*, and *pray with our spirits*, and continue instant in prayer. Nor can we expect that the best of our prayers should gain acceptance, and bring in an answer of peace, but through the mediation of Christ, who *ever lives, making intercession*.

2. How, when he was thus employed, he was *honoured* with a messenger, a special messenger sent from heaven to him (v. 11): *There appeared unto him an angel of the Lord*. Some observe, that we never read of an angel appearing in the temple, with a message from God, but only this one to

Zacharias, because *there* God had other ways of making known his mind, as the Urim and Thummim, and by a still small voice from between the cherubim; but the ark and the oracle were wanting in the second temple, and therefore, when an express was to be sent to a priest in the temple, an angel was to be employed in it, and thereby the gospel was to be introduced, for *that*, as the *law*, was given at first very much by the *ministry of angels*, the appearance of which we often read of in the Gospels and the Acts, though the design both of the law and of the gospel, when brought to perfection, was to settle another way of correspondence, more spiritual, between God and man. This angel stood *on the right side of the altar of incense*, the north side of it, saith Dr. Lightfoot, on Zacharias's right hand; compare this with ~~xxx~~ Zechariah 3:1, where Satan stands at the *right hand* of Joshua the priest, to *resist him*; but Zacharias had a good angel standing *at his right hand*, to encourage him. Some think that this angel appeared coming *out of the most holy place*, which led him to stand at the right side of the altar.

**3.** What impression this made upon Zacharias (v. 12): *When Zacharias saw him*, it was a surprise upon him, even to a degree of terror, for he was *troubled*, and *fear fell upon him*, v. 12. Though he was *righteous before God*, and *blameless* in his conversation, yet he could not be without some apprehensions at the sight of one whose visage and surrounding lustre bespoke him more than *human*. Ever since man sinned, his mind has been unable to bear the glory of such revelations and his conscience afraid of evil tidings brought by them; even Daniel himself could not bear it, ~~cxviii~~ Daniel 10:8. And for this reason God chooses to speak to us by men like ourselves, whose *terror shall not make us afraid*.

**III.** The message which the angel had to deliver to him, v. 13. He began his message, as angels generally did, with, *Fear not*. Perhaps it had never been Zacharias's lot to *burn incense* before; and, being a very serious conscientious man, we may suppose him full of care to do it *well*, and perhaps when he saw the angel he was afraid lest he came to rebuke him for some mistake or miscarriage; "No," saith the angel, "*fear not*; I have no ill tidings to bring thee from heaven. *Fear not*, but compose thyself, that thou mayest with a sedate and even spirit receive the message I have to deliver thee." Let us see what that is.

**1.** The *prayers* he has often made shall now receive an *answer of peace*: *Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard*.

(1.) If he means his particular prayer *for a son* to build up his family, it must be the prayers he had formerly made for that mercy, when he was likely to have children; but we may suppose, now that he and his wife were both *well stricken in years*, as they had done expecting it, so they had done praying for it: like Moses, it *sufficeth them*, and they *speak no more to God of that matter*, <sup><085></sup>Deuteronomy 3:26. But God will now, in giving this mercy, look a great way back to the prayers that he had made long since for and with his wife, as Isaac for and with his, <sup><020></sup>Genesis 25:21. Note, Prayers of faith are *filed* in heaven, and are not *forgotten*, though the thing prayed for is not presently *given* in. Prayers made when we were young and coming into the world may be answered when we are old and going out of the world. But,

(2.) If he means the prayers he was *now making*, and offering up with his incense, we may suppose that those were according to the duty of his place, for the Israel of God and their welfare, and the performance of the promises made to them concerning the Messiah and the coming of his kingdom: “This prayer of thine is now *heard*: for thy wife shall shortly conceive him that is to be the Messiah's forerunner.” Some of the Jewish writers themselves say that the priest, when he burnt incense, prayed for the *salvation of the whole world*; and now that prayer shall be heard. Or,

(3.) In general, “The prayers thou *now* makest, and all thy prayers, are accepted of God, and *come up for a memorial* before him” (as the angel said to Cornelius, when he visited him at prayer, <sup><400></sup>Acts 10:30, 31); “and this shall be the sign that thou are accepted of God, Elisabeth shall *bear thee a son*.” Note, it is very comfortable to praying people to know that their *prayers* are *heard*; and those mercies are doubly sweet that are given in answer to prayer.

2. He shall have a son in his old age, by Elisabeth his wife, who had been long barren, that by his birth, which was *next* to miraculous, people might be prepared to receive and believe a virgin's bringing forth of a son, which was *perfectly* miraculous. He is directed what name to give his son: *Call him John*, in Hebrew *Johanán*, a name we often meet in the Old Testament: it signifies *gracious*. The priests must *beseech God that he will be gracious* (<sup><300></sup>Malachi 1:9), and must so *bless the people*, <sup><065></sup>Numbers 6:25. Zacharias was now praying thus, and the angel tells him that his prayer is heard, and he shall have a son, whom, in token of an answer to

his prayer, he shall call *Gracious*, or, *The Lord will be gracious*, <sup>2818</sup>Isaiah 30:18, 19.

**3.** This son shall be the joy of his family and of all his relations, v. 14. He shall be another Isaac, thy laughter; and some think that is partly intended in his name, *John*. He shall be a *welcome child*. *Thou* for thy part *shall have joy and gladness*. Note, Mercies that have been long *waited for*, when they *come at last*, are the more acceptable. “He shall be such a son as thou shalt have reason to rejoice in; many parents, if they could foresee what their children will prove, instead of *rejoicing* at their birth, would wish they had *never been*; but I will tell thee what thy son will be, and then thou wilt not need to *rejoice with trembling* at his birth, as the best must do, but mayest rejoice with triumph at it.” Nay, and *many shall rejoice at his birth*; all the relations of the family will rejoice in it, and all its well-wishers, because it is for the honour and comfort of the family, v. 58. All good people will rejoice that such a religious couple as Zacharias and Elisabeth have a son, because they will give him a good education, such as, it may be hoped, will make him a public blessing to his generation. Yea, and perhaps many shall rejoice by an *unaccountable instinct*, as a presage of the joyous days the gospel will introduce.

**4.** This son shall be a distinguished *favourite of Heaven*, and a distinguished  *blessing to the earth*. The honour of having *a son* is nothing to the honour of having *such a son*.

**(1.)** He shall be *great in the sight of the Lord*; those are great indeed that are so in God's sight, not those that are so in the eye of a vain and carnal world. God will *set him before his face* continually, will employ him in his work and send him on his errands; and that shall make him truly *great* and honourable. He shall be a *prophet*, yea *more than a prophet*, and upon that account as great as any that every were *born of women*, <sup>2819</sup>Matthew 11:11. He shall live very much *retired* from the world, out of men's sight, and, when he makes a public appearance, it will be very *mean*; but he shall be *much*, he shall be *great, in the sight of the Lord*.

**(2.)** He shall be a Nazarite, set apart to God from every thing that is *polluting*; in token of this, according to the law of Nazariteship, he *shall drink neither wine nor strong drink*, — or, rather, neither *old wine nor new*; for most think that the word here translated *strong drink* signifies some sort of wine, perhaps those that we call *made wines*, or any thing that is *intoxicating*. He shall be, as Samson was by the divine precept

(<sup>173E</sup>Judges 13:7), and Samuel by his mother's vow (<sup>90B</sup>1 Samuel 1:11), a Nazarite for life. It is spoken of as a great instance of God's favour to his people that he *raised up of their sons for prophets, and their young men for Nazarites* (<sup>302B</sup>Amos 2:11), as if those that were designed for prophets were trained up under the discipline of the Nazarites; Samuel and John Baptist were; which intimates that those that would be *eminent* servants of God, and employed in *eminent* services, must learn to live a life of self-denial and mortification, must be dead to the pleasures of sense, and keep their minds from every thing that is darkening and disturbing to them.

**(3.)** He shall be abundantly fitted and qualified for those great and eminent services to which in due time he shall be called: *He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb*, and as soon as it is possible he shall appear to have been so. Observe,

**[1.]** Those that would be filled with the Holy Ghost must be sober and temperate, and very moderate in the use of wine and strong drink; for *that* is it that fits him for *this*. *Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit*, with which that is not consistent, <sup>458</sup>Ephesians 5:18.

**[2.]** It is possible that infants may be wrought upon by the *Holy Ghost*, even from their *mother's womb*; for John Baptist even then was *filled with the Holy Ghost*, who took possession of his heart betimes; and an early specimen was given of it, when he *leaped in his mother's womb for joy*, at the approach of the Saviour; and afterwards it appeared very early that he was *sanctified*. God had promised to *pour out his Spirit* upon the *seed* of believers (<sup>240B</sup>Isaiah 44:3), and their first *springing up* in a dedication of themselves betimes to God is the fruit of it, v. 4, 5. Who then can forbid water, that they should not be baptized who for aught we know (and we can say no more of the adult, witness Simon Magus) have received the Holy Ghost as well as we, and have the *seeds of grace* sown in their hearts? <sup>410E</sup>Acts 10:47.

**(4.)** He shall be instrumental for the conversion of many souls to God, and the preparing of them to receive and entertain the gospel of Christ, v. 16, 17.

**[1.]** He shall be sent to the *children of Israel*, to the nation of the Jews, to whom the Messiah also was *first* sent, and not to the Gentiles; to the *whole* nation, and not the family of *the priests only*, with which, though he was

himself of that family, we do not find he had any particular intimacy or influence.

[2.] He shall go before *the Lord their God*, that is, before the Messiah, whom they must expect to be, not *their king*, in the sense wherein they commonly take it, a *temporal prince* to their nation, but *their Lord* and *their God*, to rule and defend, and serve them in a *spiritual* way by his influence on their hearts. Thomas knew this, when he said to Christ, *My Lord and my God*, better than Nathanael did, when he said, *Rabbi, thou are the king of Israel*. John shall go before him, a little before him, to give notice of his approach, and to prepare people to receive him.

[3.] He shall go *in the spirit and power of Elias*. That is, *First*, He shall be such a man as Elias was, and do such work as Elias did, — shall, like him, preach the necessity of repentance and reformation to a very corrupt and degenerate age, — shall, like him, be bold and zealous in reproving sin and witnessing against it even in the greatest, and be hated and persecuted for it by a Herod and his Herodias, as Elijah was by an Ahab and his Jezebel. He shall be carried on in his work, as Elijah was, by a divine *spirit and power*, which shall crown his ministry with wonderful success. As Elias went *before* the *writing* prophets of the Old Testament, and did as it were *usher* in that *signal* period of the Old-Testament dispensation by a little *writing* of his own (<sup>421</sup>2 Chronicles 21:12), so John Baptist went before Christ and his apostles, and introduced the gospel dispensation by preaching the substance of the gospel doctrine and duty, *Repent, with an eye to the kingdom of heaven*. *Secondly*, He shall be that very person who was prophesied of by Malachi under the name of Elijah (<sup>305</sup>Malachi 4:5), who should be sent *before the coming of the day of the Lord*. Behold, I *send you a prophet, even Elias*, not Elias the Tishbite (as the Septuagint has corruptly read it, to favour the Jews' traditions), but a prophet *in the spirit and power of Elias*, as the angel here expounds it.

[4.] He shall *turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God*, shall incline their hearts to receive the Messiah, and bid him welcome, by awakening them to a sense of sin and a desire of righteousness. Whatever has a tendency to *turn us from iniquity*, as John's preaching and baptism had, will turn us to Christ as *our Lord and our God*; for those who through grace are wrought upon to shake off the yoke of sin, that is, the dominion of the world and the flesh, will soon be persuaded to take upon them the yoke of the *Lord Jesus*.

[5.] Hereby he shall *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children*, that is, of the Jews to the Gentiles; shall help to conquer the rooted prejudices which the Jews have against the Gentiles, which was done by the gospel, as far as it prevailed, and was begun to be done by John Baptist, who came *for a witness, that all through him might believe*, who baptized and taught Roman soldiers as well as Jewish Pharisees, and who cured the pride and confidence of those Jews who gloried in their having Abraham to their father, and told them that God would *out of stones raise up children unto Abraham* (<sup>408</sup>Matthew 3:9), which would tend to *cure* their enmity to the Gentiles. Dr. Lightfoot observes, It is the constant usage of the prophets to speak of the church of the Gentiles as children to the Jewish church, <sup>2515</sup>Isaiah 54:5, 6, 13; 60:4, 9; 62:5; 66:12. When the Jews that embraced the faith of Christ were brought to join in communion with the Gentiles that did so too, then the heart of the fathers was turned to the children. And he shall *turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*, that is, he shall introduce the gospel, by which the Gentiles, who are now *disobedient*, shall be turned, no so much to their fathers the Jews, but to the faith of Christ, here called the *wisdom of the just*, in communion with the believing Jews; or thus, He shall *turn the hearts of the fathers with the children*, that is, the hearts of old and young, shall be instrumental to bring some of every age to be *religious*, to work a great reformation in the Jewish nation, to bring them *off from* a ritual traditional religion which that had rested in, and to bring them up to *substantial serious* godliness: and the effect of this will be, that enmities will be slain and discord made to cease; and they are at variance, being united in his baptism, will be better reconciled one to another. This agrees with the account Josephus gives of John Baptist, *Antiq.* 18.117-118. “That he was a good man, and taught the Jews the exercise of virtue, in piety towards God, and righteous towards one another, and that they should convene and knit together in baptism.” And he saith, “The people flocked after him, and were exceedingly delighted in his doctrine.” Thus he turned the hearts of fathers and children to God and to one another, by *turning the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*. Observe, *First*, True religion is *the wisdom of just men*, in distinction from the *wisdom of the world*. It is both our wisdom and our duty to be religious; there is both equity and prudence in it. *Secondly*, It is not possible but that those who have been unbelieving and *disobedient* may be turned to the *wisdom of the just*; divine grace can conquer the greatest ignorance and prejudice. *Thirdly*, The great design of the gospel is to bring people *home* to God, and to bring them nearer to *one another*; and

on this errand John Baptist is sent. In the mention that is *twice* made of his *turning* people, there seems to be an allusion to the name of the Tishbite, which is given to Elijah, which, some think, does not denote the country or city he was of, but has an appellative signification, and therefore the render it Elijah the *converter*, one that was much employed, and very successful, in *conversion-work*. The Elias of the New Testament is therefore said to *turn* or *convert* many to the Lord their God.

[6.] Hereby he shall *make ready a people prepared for the Lord*, shall dispose the minds of people to receive the doctrine of Christ, that thereby they may be *prepared* for the comforts of his coming. Note, *First*, All that are to be *devoted* to the Lord, and *made happy* in him, must first be *prepared* and *made ready* for him. We must be prepared by grace in this world for the glory in the other, by the terrors of the law for the comforts of the gospel, by the spirit of bondage for the Spirit of adoption. *Secondly*, Nothing has a more direct tendency to prepare people for Christ than the doctrine of repentance received and submitted to. When sin is thereby made grievous, Christ will become very precious.

**IV.** Zacharias's unbelief of the angel's prediction, and the rebuke he was laid under for that unbelief. He heard all that the angel had to say, and should have bowed his head, and worshipped the Lord, saying, *Be it unto thy servant according to the word* which thou hast spoken; but it was not so. We are here told,

**1.** What his unbelief spoke, v. 18. He said to the angel, *Whereby shall I know this?* This was not a humble petition for the confirming of his faith, but a peevish objection against what was said to him as altogether incredible; as if he should say, "I can never be made to believe this." He could not but perceive that it was *an angel* that spoke to him; the message delivered, having reference to the Old-Testament prophecies, carried much of its own evidence along with it. There are many instances in the Old Testament of those that had children when they were old, yet he cannot believe that he shall have this child of promise: "*For I am an old man, and my wife hath not only been all her days barren, but is now well stricken in years, and not likely ever to have children.*" Therefore he must have a *sign* given him, or he will not believe. Though the appearance of an angel, which had long been disused in the church, was sign enough, — though he had this notice given him in the temple, the place of God's oracles, where he had reason to think no evil angel would be permitted to come, —



though it was given him when he was praying, and burning incense, — and though a firm belief of that great principle of religion that God has an almighty power, and with him *nothing is impossible*, which we ought not only to *know*, but to teach others, was enough to silence all objections, — yet, considering his own body and his wife's too much, unlike a son of Abraham, he *staggered at the promise*, <sup><819></sup>Romans 4:19, 20.

2. How his unbelief was *silenced*, and he *silenced* for it.

(1.) The angel *stops his mouth*, by *asserting* his authority. Doth he ask, *Whereby shall I know this?* Let him know it by this, *I am Gabriel*, v. 19. He puts his name to his prophecy, doth as it were sign it with his own hand, *teste meipso* — *take my word for it*. Angels have sometimes refused to tell their names, as to Manoah and his wife; but his angel readily saith, *I am Gabriel*, which signifies *the power of God*, or the *mighty one of God*, intimating that the God who bade him say this was able to make it good. He also makes himself known by this name to put him in mind of the notices of the Messiah's coming sent to Daniel by the *man Gabriel*, <sup><278></sup>Daniel 8:16; 9:21. “*I am the same* that was sent then, and am sent now in pursuance of the same intention.” He is Gabriel, who *stands in the presence of God*, an immediate attendant upon the throne of God. The prime ministers of state in the Persian court are described by this, that they *saw the king's face*, <sup><704></sup>Esther 1:14. “*Though I am now talking with thee here, yet I stand in the presence of God*. I know his eye is upon me, and I dare not say any more than I have warrant to say. But I declare *I am sent to speak to thee*, sent on purpose to *show thee these glad tidings*, which, being so well worthy of all acceptation, thou oughtest to have received cheerfully.”

(2.) The angel *stops his mouth* indeed, by *exerting his power*: “*That thou mayest object no more, behold thou shalt be dumb*, v. 20. If thou wilt have a sign for the support of thy faith, it shall be such a one as shall be also the punishment of thine unbelief; thou *shalt not be able to speak till the day that these things shall be performed*,” v. 20. Thou shalt be both *dumb* and *deaf*; the same word signifies both, and it is plain that he lost his hearing as well as his speech, for his friends *made signs* to him (v. 62), as well as he to them, v. 22. Now, in striking him dumb,

[1.] God dealt *justly* with him, because he had objected against God's word. Hence we may take occasion to admire the patience of God and his forbearance toward us, that we, who have often spoken to his dishonour,

have not been struck dumb, as Zacharias was, and as we had been if God had dealt with us according to our sins.

[2.] God dealt *kindly* with him, and very tenderly and graciously. For, *First*, Thus he prevented his speaking any more such distrustful unbelieving words. If he has *thought evil*, and will not himself *lay his hands upon his mouth*, nor keep it as with a bridle, God will. It is better not to speak at all than to *speak wickedly*. *Secondly*, Thus he *confirmed* his faith; and, by his being disabled to *speak*, he is enabled to *think* the better. If by the rebukes we are under for our sin we be brought to give more credit to the word of God, we have no reason to complain of them. *Thirdly*, Thus he was kept from divulging the vision, and boasting of it, which otherwise he would have been apt to do, whereas it was designed for the present to be lodged as a secret with him. *Fourthly*, It was a great mercy that God's words should be fulfilled in their season, notwithstanding his sinful distrust. The *unbelief of man* shall not *make the promises of God of no effect*, they shall be *fulfilled in their season*, and he shall not be for ever *dumb*, but only *till the day that these things shall be performed*, and then thy *lips shall be opened*, that thy *mouth may show forth God's praise*. Thus, though God *chastens the iniquity* of his people *with the rod*, yet his *loving kindness* he *will not take away*.

**V.** The return of Zacharias to the people, and at length to his family, and the conception of this child of promise, the son of his old age.

**1.** The people staid, expecting Zacharias to come out of the temple, because he was to pronounce the blessing upon them in the name of the Lord; and, though he staid beyond the usual time, yet they did not, as is too common in Christian congregations, hurry away without the blessing, but *waited* for him, marvelling that he *tarried so long in the temple*, and afraid let something was amiss, v. 21.

**2.** When he came out, he was *speechless*, v. 22. He was now to have dismissed the congregation with a blessing, but was dumb and not able to do it, that the people may be minded to expect the Messiah, who can *command* the blessing, who *blesseth indeed*, and in whom *all the nations of the earth are blessed*. Aaron's priesthood is now shortly to be *silenced* and *set aside*, to make way for the *bringing in* of a *better hope*.

**3.** He made a shift to give them to understand that he had *seen a vision*, by some awful signs he made, for he *beckoned to them*, and *remained*

*speechless*, v. 22. This represents to us the weakness and deficiency of the Levitical priesthood, in comparison with Christ's priesthood and the dispensation of the gospel. The Old Testament speaks by signs, gives us some intimations of divine and heavenly things, but *imperfect* and uncertain; it *beckons to us*, but *remains speechless*. It is the gospel that speaks to us articulately, and gives us a clear view of that which the Old Testament was seen *through a glass darkly*.

4. He staid out the *days of his ministration*; for, his lot being to *burn incense*, he could do that, though he was *dumb* and *deaf*. When we cannot perform the service of God so well as we would, yet, if we perform it as well as we can, God will accept of us in it.

5. He then returned to his family, and his *wife conceived*, v. 23, 24. She conceived by virtue of the promise, and, being sensible of it, *she hid herself five months*; she kept house, and kept it private, and did not go abroad so much as she used to do,

(1.) Lest she should do herself any prejudice, so as might occasion her miscarrying, or any hurt to the conception.

(2.) Lest she should contract any ceremonial pollution which might intrench upon the Nazariteship of her child, remembering the command given to Samson's mother in a like case, and applying it to herself; she must not *touch any unclean thing* while she is with child of a Nazarite, <sup><0734></sup>Judges 13:14. And though *five months* are mentioned, because of what follows *in the sixth month*, yet we may suppose that she did in like manner take care of herself during the whole time of her being with child.

(3.) Some think it was in an excess of modesty that she *hid herself*, ashamed it should be said that one of her age should be with child. *Shall she have pleasure, being old, her lord being old also?* <sup><0182></sup>Genesis 18:12. Or, it was in token of her humility, that she might not seem to boast of the honour God had put upon her.

(4.) She *hid herself* for devotion, that she might spend her time in prayer and praise. The saints are God's *hidden ones*; she gives this reason for her retirement; "*For thus hath the Lord dealt with me*; not only thus *graciously* in giving me a child, but thus *honourably* in giving me such a child as is to be a Nazarite" (for so her husband might by writing signify to her); "*he hath taken away my reproach among men.*" Fruitlessness was

looked upon to be so great a blessing among the Jews, because of the promises of the increase of their nation, and the rising of the Messiah among them, that it was a great reproach to be barren; and those who were so, though ever so *blameless*, were concluded to be guilty of some great sin *unknown*, for which they were punished. Now Elisabeth triumphs, that not only this reproach is taken away, but great glory is put upon her instead of it: *Thus hath the Lord dealt with me*, beyond any thought or expectation of mine, *in the days wherein he looked on me*. Note, In God's gracious dealings with us we ought to observe his gracious regards to us. He has *looked upon us* with compassion and favour, and therefore has thus *dealt with us*.

## LUKE 1:26-38

### THE BIRTH OF CHRIST FORETOLD

We have here notice given us of all that it was fit we should know concerning the incarnation and conception of our blessed Saviour, six months after the conception of John. The same angel, Gabriel, that was employed in making known to Zacharias God's purpose concerning *his son*, is employed in this also; for in this, the same glorious work of redemption, which was *begun* in that, is *carried on*. As bad angels are none of the redeemed, so good angels are none of the redeemers; yet they are employed by the Redeemer as his messengers, and they go cheerfully on his errands, because they are his Father's humble servants, and his children's hearty friends and well-wishers.

**I.** We have here an account given of the mother of our Lord, of whom he was to be born, whom, though we are not to pray to, yet we ought to praise God for.

- 1.** Her name was *Mary*, the same name with *Miriam*, the sister of Moses and Aaron; the name signifies *exalted*, and a great elevation it was to her indeed to be thus *favoured* above all the daughters of the house of David.
- 2.** She was a daughter of the royal family, lineally descended from David, and she herself and all her friends knew it, for she went under the title and character of the *house of David*, though she was poor and low in the world; and she was enabled by God's providence, and the care of the Jews,

to preserve their genealogies, to *make it out*, and as long as the promise of the Messiah was to be fulfilled it was *worth keeping*; but for those now, who are brought low in the world, to have descended from persons of honour, is not worth mentioning.

**3.** She was *a virgin*, a pure unspotted one, but *espoused* to one of the same royal stock, like her, however, of low estate; so that upon both accounts there was (as it was fit there should be) an equality between them; his name was Joseph; he also was *of the house of David*, ~~and~~ Matthew 1:20. Christ's mother was a *virgin*, because he was not to be born by ordinary generation, but miraculously; it was necessary that he should be so, that, though he must partake of the nature of man, yet not of the corruption of that nature: but he was born of a *virgin espoused*, made up to be married, and contracted, to put honour upon the married state, that that might not be brought into contempt (which was an ordinance in innocency) by the Redeemer's being born of a virgin.

**4.** She lived in Nazareth, a *city of Galilee*, a remote corner of the country, and in no reputation for religion or learning, but which bordered upon the heathen, and therefore was called *Galilee of the Gentiles*. Christ's having his relations resident there intimates favour in reserve for the Gentile world. And Dr. Lightfoot observes that Jonah was by birth a Galilean, and Elijah and Elisha very much conversant in Galilee, who were all famous *prophets of the Gentiles*. The angel was sent to her from Nazareth. Note, No distance or disadvantage of place shall be a prejudice to those for whom God has favours in store. The angel Gabriel carries his message as cheerfully to Mary and Nazareth in Galilee as to Zacharias in the temple at Jerusalem.

**II.** The *address* of the angel to her, v. 28. We are not told what she was doing, or how employed, when the angel came *unto her*; but he surprised her with this salutation, *Hail, thou art highly favoured*. This was intended to raise in her,

**1.** A value for *herself*; and, though it is very rare that any need to have any sparks struck into their breast with such design, yet in some, who like Mary pore only on their *low estate*, there is occasion for it.

**2.** An expectation of great news, not from abroad, but from above. Heaven designs, no doubt, uncommon favours for one whom an angel makes court to with such respect, *Hail thou, chaire* — *rejoice thou*; it was the usual

form of salutation; it expresses an esteem of her, and good-will to her and her prosperity.

(1.) She is dignified: “Thou art *highly favoured*. God, in his choice of thee to be the mother of the Messiah, has put an honour upon thee peculiar to thyself, above that of Eve, who was the mother of *all living*.” The vulgar Latin translates this *gratificata plena* — *full of grace*, and thence gathers that she had more of the inherent graces of the Spirit than ever any had; whereas it is certain that this bespeaks no other than the singular favour done her in preferring her to conceive and bear our blessed Lord, an honour which, since he was to be the *seed of the woman*, some woman must have, not for *personal merit*, but purely for the sake of *free grace*, and she is pitched upon. *Even so, Father, because it seemed good unto thee.*

(2.) She has the presence of God with her: “*The Lord is with thee*, though poor and mean, and perhaps now forecasting how to get a livelihood and maintain a family in the married state.” The angel with this word raised the faith of Gideon (<sup><0162></sup>Judges 6:12): *The Lord is with thee*. Nothing is to be despaired of, not the performance of any service, not the obtaining of any favour, though ever so great, if we have *God with us*. This word might put her in mind of the Immanuel, *God with us*, which a virgin shall *conceive and bear* (<sup><2174></sup>Isaiah 7:14), and why not she?

(3.) She has the blessing of God upon her: “*Blessed art thou among women*; not only thou shalt be accounted so by men, but thou shalt be so. Thou that art so *highly favoured* in this instance mayest expect in other things to be *blessed*.” She explains this herself (v. 48), *All generations shall call me blessed*. Compare it with that which Deborah saith of Jael, another that was the glory of her sex (<sup><0162></sup>Judges 5:24), *Blessed shall she be above women in the tent*.

**III.** The consternation she was in, upon this address (v. 29). *When she saw him*, and the glories with which he was surrounded, she was *troubled* at the sight of him, and much more *at his saying*. Had she been a proud ambitious young woman, that aimed high, and flattered herself with the expectation of great things in the world, she would have been *pleased* at his saying, would have been puffed up with it, and (as we have reason to think she was a young woman of very good sense) would have had an answer ready, signifying so much: but, instead of that, she is *confounded*

at it, as not conscious to herself of any thing that either *merited* or *promised* such great things; and she *cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be*. Was it from heaven or of men? Was it to amuse her? was it to ensnare her? was it to banter her? or was there something substantial and weighty in it? But, of all the thoughts she had as to *what manner of salutation it should be*, I believe she had not the least idea of its being ever intended or used for a prayer, as it is, and has been, for many ages, by the corrupt, degenerate, and anti-christian ages of the church, and to be ten times repeated for the Lord's prayer once; so it is in the church of Rome. But her thoughtfulness upon this occasion gives a very useful intimation to young people of her sex, when addresses are made to them, to consider and *cast in their minds* what manner of *salutations* they are, whence they come, and what their tendency is, that they may receive them accordingly, and may always *stand on their guard*.

**IV.** The message itself which the angel had to deliver to her. Some time the angel gives her to *pause*; but, observing that this did but increase her perplexity, he went on with his errand, v. 30. To what he had said she made no reply; he therefore confirms it: "*Fear not, Mary, I have no other design than to assure thee that thou hast found favour with God more than thou thinkest of, as there are many who think they are more favoured with God than they really are.*" Note, Those that have *found favour with God* should not give way to disquieting distrustful fears. Doth God favour thee? Fear not, though the world frown upon thee. Is he for thee? No matter who is against thee.

**1.** Though she is a *virgin*, she shall have the honour of being a *mother*: "*Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and thou shalt have the naming of him; thou shalt call his name Jesus,*" v. 31. It was the sentence upon Eve, that, though she should have the honour to be the *mother of all living*, yet this mortification shall be an allay to that honour, that *her desire shall be to her husband, and he shall rule over her,*  
GEN 3:16 Genesis 3:16. But Mary has the honour without the allay.

**2.** Though she lives in *poverty* and *obscurity*, yet she shall have the honour to be the mother of the Messiah; her son shall be named *Jesus* — a *Saviour*, such a one as the world *needs*, rather than such one as the Jews *expect*.

(1.) He will be very *nearly allied* to the *upper world*. He shall be *great*, truly great, incontestably great; for he shall be called *the Son of the Highest*, the Son of God who is *the Highest*; of the same nature, as the son is of the same nature with the father; and very dear to him, as the son is to the father. He shall be *called*, and not *miscalled*, the *Son of the Highest*; for he is himself *God over all, blessed for evermore*, <sup><B></sup>Romans 9:5. Note, Those who are the children of God, though but by adoption and regeneration, are *truly great*, and therefore are concerned to be *very good*, <sup><A></sup>1 John 3:1, 2.

(2.) He will be very *highly preferred* in the *lower world*; for, though born under the most disadvantageous circumstances possible, and appearing in the form of a servant, yet *the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David*, v. 32. He puts her in mind that she was *of the house of David*; and that therefore, since neither the *Salique law*, nor the right of primogeniture, took place in the entail of his throne, it was not impossible but that she might bring forth an heir to it, and therefore might the more easily *believe* it when she was told by an angel from heaven that she *should* do so, that after the sceptre had been long *departed* from that ancient and honourable family it should now at length return to it again, to remain in it, not by succession, but in the same hand to eternity. His people will not *give him that throne*, will not acknowledge his right to *rule them*; but the *Lord God* shall give him a right to *rule them*, and set him as *his king* upon the *holy hill of Zion*. He assures her,

[1.] That his kingdom shall be *spiritual*: he shall *reign over the house of Jacob*, not *Israel according to the flesh*, for they neither came into his interests nor did they continue long a people; it must therefore be a *spiritual* kingdom, the house of Israel *according to the promise*, that he must *rule over*.

[2.] That it shall be eternal: he shall reign *for ever*, and *of his kingdom there shall be no end*, as there had been long since of the temporal reign of David's house, and would shortly be of the state of Israel. Other crowns endure not *to every generation*, but Christ's doth, <sup><A></sup>Proverbs 27:24. The gospel is the *last* dispensation, we are to look for no other.

V. The further information given her, upon her enquiry concerning the birth of this prince.



**1.** It is a just enquiry which she makes: “*How shall this be?*” v. 34. How can I now presently conceive a child” (for so the angel meant) “when I *know not a man*; must it therefore be otherwise than by ordinary generation? If so, let me now *how?*” She knew that the Messiah must be born of *a virgin*; and, if she must be his mother, she desires to know how. This was not the language of her distrust, or any doubt of what the angel said, but of a desire to be further instructed.

**2.** It is a satisfactory answer that is given to it, v. 35.

**(1.)** She shall conceive by *the power of the Holy Ghost*, whose proper work and office is to *sanctify*, and therefore to sanctify the virgin for this purpose. The Holy Ghost is called the *power of the Highest*. Doth she ask how this shall be? This is enough to help her over all the difficulty there appears in it; a divine power will undertake it, not the power of an angel employed in it, as in other works of wonder, but the power of *the Holy Ghost* himself.

**(2.)** She must *ask no questions* concerning the way and manner how it shall be wrought; for the Holy Ghost, as the *power of the Highest*, shall *overshadow* her, as the *cloud* covered the tabernacle when the glory of God took possession of it, to conceal it from those that would too curiously observe the motions of it, and pry into the mystery of it. The formation of every babe in the womb, and the entrance of the spirit of life into it, is a mystery in nature; none knows *the way of the spirit, nor how the bones are formed in the womb of her that is with child*, <sup><2116></sup>Ecclesiastes 11:5. We were *made in secret*, <sup><4395></sup>Psalm 139:15, 16. Much more was the formation of the child Jesus a *mystery*; without controversy, *great was the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh*, <sup><5196></sup>1 Timothy 3:16. It is a *new thing created in the earth* (<sup><2612></sup>Jeremiah 31:22), concerning which we must not covet to be *wise above what is written*.

**(3.)** The child she shall conceive is a *holy thing*, and therefore must not be conceived by *ordinary generation*, because he must not share in the common corruption and pollution of the human nature. He is spoken of emphatically, *That Holy Thing*, such as never was; and he shall be called *the Son of God*, as the Son of the Father by eternal generation, as an indication of which he shall now be formed by the Holy Ghost in the present conception. His human nature must be so produced, as it was fit that should be which was to be taken into union with the divine nature.

**3.** It was a further encouragement to her faith to be told that *her cousin Elisabeth*, though stricken in years, was *with child*, v. 36. Here is an age of wonders beginning, and therefore be not surprised: here is one among thy own relations truly great, though not altogether so great as this; it is usual with God to advance in working wonders. *Greater works than these shall ye do*. Though Elisabeth was, on the father's side, of the *daughters of Aaron* (v. 5), yet on the mother's side she might be of the house of David, for those two families often intermarried, as an earnest of the uniting of the royalty and the priesthood of the Messiah. *This is the sixth month with her that was called barren*. This intimates, as Dr. Lightfoot thinks, that all the instances in the Old Testament of those having children that had been long barren, which was above nature, were designed to prepare the world for the belief of a virgin's bearing a son, which was against nature. And therefore, even in the birth of Isaac, Abraham saw Christ's day, foresaw such a miracle in the birth of Christ. The angel assures Mary of this, to encourage her faith, and concludes with that great truth, of undoubted certainty and universal use, *For with God nothing shall be impossible* (v. 37), and, if nothing, then not this. Abraham therefore staggered not at the belief of the divine promise, because he was strong in his belief of the divine power, <sup>400</sup>Romans 4:20, 21. No *word* of God must be *incredible to us*, as long as no *work* of God is *impossible to him*.

**VI.** Her acquiescence in the will of God concerning her, v. 38. She owns herself,

**1.** A believing subject to the divine authority: “*Behold, the handmaid of the Lord*. Lord, I am at thy service, at thy disposal, to do what thou commandest me.” She objects not the danger of spoiling her marriage, and blemishing her reputation, but leaves the issue with God, and submits entirely to his will.

**2.** A believing expectant of the divine favour. She is not only content that it should be so, but humbly desires that it may be so: *Be it unto me according to thy word*. Such a favour as this it was not for her to slight, or be indifferent to; and for what God has *promised* he will be *sought unto*; by prayer we must put our *amen*, or *so be it*, to the promise. *Remember*, and perform *thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou has caused me to hope*. We must, as Mary here, *guide* our desires by the word of God, and *ground* our hopes *upon* it. Be it unto me *according to thy word*; just so, and no otherwise.

Hereupon, *the angel departed from her*; having completed the errand he was sent upon, he returned, to give an account of it, and receive new instructions. Converse with angels was always a transient thing, and soon over; it will be constant and permanent in the future state. It is generally supposed that just at this instant the virgin *conceived*, by the *overshadowing power* of the Holy Ghost: but, the scripture being decently silent concerning it, it doth not become us to be *inquisitive*, much less *positive*.

## LUKE 1:39-56

### THE SONG OF MARY

We have here an interview between the two happy mothers, Elisabeth and Mary: the angel, by intimating to Mary the favour bestowed on her cousin Elisabeth (v. 36), gave occasion for it; and sometimes it may prove a better piece of service that we think to bring good people together, to compare notes. Here is,

**I.** The visit which Mary made to Elisabeth. Mary was the *younger*, and younger with child; and therefore, if they must come together, it was fittest that Mary should take the journey, not insisting on the preference which the greater dignity of her conception gave her, v. 39. She *arose*, and left her affairs, to attend this greater matter: *in those days, at that time* (as it is commonly explained, <sup>2435</sup>Jeremiah 33:15; 50:4), in a day or two after the angel had visited her, taking some time first, as it is supposed, for her devotion, or rather hastening away to her cousin's, where she would have more leisure, and better help, in the family of a priest. She went, *meta spoudes* — *with care, diligence, and expedition*; not as young people commonly go abroad and visit their friends, to *divert* herself, but to *inform* herself: she went *to a city of Judah in the hill-country*; it is not named, but by comparing the description of it here with <sup>4610</sup>Joshua 21:10, 11, it appears to be *Hebron*, for that is there said to be *in the hill-country of Judah*, and to belong to the priests, the sons of Aaron; thither Mary hastened, though it was a long journey, some scores of miles.

**1.** Dr. Lightfoot offers a conjecture that she was to *conceive* our Saviour there at Hebron, and perhaps had so much intimated to her by the angel, or some other way; and therefore she made such haste thither. He thinks it

probable that Shiloh, of the tribe of Judah, and the seed of David, should be *conceived* in a city of Judah and of David, as he was to be born in Bethlehem, another city which belonged to them both. In Hebron the promise was given to Isaac, circumcision was instituted. Here (saith he) Abraham had his first land, and David his first crown: here lay interred the three couples, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah, and, as antiquity has held, Adam and Eve. He therefore thinks that it suits singularly with the harmony and consent which God uses in his works that the promise should begin to take place by the conception of the Messias, even among those patriarchs to whom it was given. I see no improbability in the conjecture, but add this for the support of it, that Elisabeth said (v. 45), *There shall be a performance*; as if it were not performed yet, but was to be performed there.

2. It is generally supposed that she went thither for the confirming of her faith by the sign which the angel had given her, her cousin's being with child, and to rejoice with her sister-favourite. And, besides, she went thither, perhaps, that she might be more retired from company, or else might have more agreeable company than she could have in Nazareth. We may suppose that she did not acquaint any of her neighbours at Nazareth with the message she had received from heaven, yet longed to *talk over* a thing she had a thousand time *thought over*, and knew no person in the world with whom she could *freely* converse concerning it but her cousin Elisabeth, and therefore she hastened to her. Note, it is very beneficial and comfortable for those that have a good work of grace begun in their souls, and Christ in the *forming* there, to consult those who are in the same case, that they may communicate experiences one to another; and they will find that, as in water face answers to face, so doth the heart of man to man, of Christian to Christian.

II. The meeting between Mary and Elisabeth. Mary entered into the house of Zacharias; but he, being *dumb* and *deaf*, kept his chamber, it is probable, and saw no company; and therefore she *saluted Elisabeth* (v. 40), told her she was come to make her a visit, to know her state, and *rejoice with her* in her joy.

Now, at their first coming together, for the confirmation of the faith of both of them, there was something very extraordinary. Mary knew that Elisabeth was with child, but it does not appear that Elisabeth had been told any thing of her cousin Mary's being designed for the mother of the

Messiah; and therefore what knowledge she appears to have had of it must have come by a *revelation*, which would be a great encouragement to Mary.

**1.** The babe *leaped in her womb*, v. 41. It is very probable that she had been several weeks *quick* (for she was six months gone), and that she had often felt the child stir; but this was a more than ordinary motion of the child, which alarmed her to expect something very extraordinary, *eskirtese*. It is the same word that is used by the Septuagint (<sup>(1752)</sup>Genesis 25:22) for the *struggling* of Jacob and Esau in Rebecca's womb, and the mountains *skipping*, <sup>(1804)</sup>Psalms 114:4. The *babe leaped* as it were to give a signal to his mother that *he* was now at hand whose forerunner he was to be, about six months in ministry, as he was in being; or, it was the effect of some strong impression made upon the mother. Now began to be fulfilled what the angel said to his father (v. 15), that he should be *filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb*; and perhaps he himself had some reference to this, when he said (<sup>(1819)</sup>John 3:29), *The friend of the Bridegroom rejoiceth greatly, because of the Bridegroom's voice*, heard, though not by him, yet by his mother.

**2.** Elisabeth was herself *filled with the Holy Ghost*, or a Spirit of prophecy, by which, as well as by the particular suggestions of the Holy Ghost she was filled with, she was given to understand that the Messiah was at hand, in whom prophecy should revive, and by whom the Holy Ghost should be more plentifully poured out than ever, according to the expectations of those who *waited for the consolation of Israel*. The uncommon motion of the babe in her womb was a token of extraordinary emotion of her spirit under a divine impulse. Note, Those whom Christ graciously visits may know it by their being *filled with the Holy Ghost*; for, *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*.

**III.** The welcome which Elisabeth, by the Spirit of prophecy, gave to Mary, the mother of our Lord; not as to a common friend making a common visit, but as to one of whom the Messiah was to be born.

**1.** She congratulates her on her honour, and, though perhaps she knew not of it till *just now*, she acknowledges it with the greatest assurance and satisfaction. She *spoke with a loud voice*, which does not at all intimate (as some think) that there was a floor or a wall between them, but that she was in a transport or exultation of joy, and said what she cared not who knew.

She said, *Blessed art thou among women*, the same word that the angels had said (v. 28); for thus this will of God, concerning honouring the Son, should be done *on earth* as it is *done in heaven*. But Elisabeth adds a reason, *Therefore blessed art thou* because *blessed is the fruit of thy womb*; thence it was that she derived this excelling dignity. Elisabeth was the wife of a priest, and in years, yet she *grudges* not that her kinswoman, who was many years younger than she, and every way her inferior, should have the honour of conceiving in her virginity, and being the mother of the Messiah, whereas the honour put upon her was *much less*; she *rejoices* in it, and is well pleased, as her son was afterwards, that she who *cometh after her is preferred before her*, <sup><412></sup>John 1:27. Note, While we cannot but own that we are more *favoured* of God than we deserve, let us by no means envy that others are *more highly* favoured than we are.

**2.** She acknowledges her condescension, in making her this visit (v. 43): *Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* Observe,

**(1.)** She calls the virgin Mary the *mother of her Lord* (as David in spirit, called the Messiah Lord, *his Lord*), for she knew he was to be *Lord of all*.

**(2.)** She not only bids her welcome to her house, though perhaps she came in mean circumstances, but reckons this visit a great favour, which she thought herself unworthy of. *Whence is this to me?* It is in reality, and not in compliment, that she saith, “This was a greater favour than I could have expected.” Note, Those that are filled with the Holy Ghost have *low thoughts* of their own merits, and high thoughts of God's favours. Her son the Baptist spoke to the same purport with this, when he said, *Comest thou to me?* <sup><414></sup>Matthew 3:14.

**3.** She acquaints her with the concurrence of the babe in her womb, in this welcome to her (v. 44): “Thou certainly bringest some extraordinary tidings, some extraordinary blessing, with thee; for *as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears*, not only my heart *leaped for joy*, though I knew not immediately why or wherefore, but the *babe in my womb*, who was not capable of knowing, *did so too*.” He *leaped* as it were *for joy* that the Messiah, whose harbinger he was to be, would himself come soon after him. This would serve very much to strengthen the faith of the virgin, that there were such assurances as these given to others; and it would be in part the accomplishment of what had been so often foretold,

that there should be *universal joy before the Lord, when he cometh,*  
Psalm 98:8, 9.

**4.** She commends her faith, and encourages it (v. 45): *Blessed is she that believed.* Believing souls are blessed souls, and will be found so at last; this blessedness cometh *through faith,* even the blessedness of being related to Christ, and having him *formed in the soul.* They are *blessed* who *believe* the word of God, for that Word will not fail them; *there shall,* without doubt, *be a performance of those things which are told her from the Lord.* Note, The inviolable certainty of the promise is the undoubted felicity of those that build upon it and expect their all from it. The faithfulness of God is the blessedness of the faith of the saints. Those that have experienced the performance of God's promises themselves should encourage others to hope that he will be as good as his word to them also: *I will tell you what God has done for my soul.*

**IV.** Mary's song of praise, upon this occasion. Elisabeth's prophecy was an echo to the virgin Mary's salutation, and this song is yet a stronger *echo* to that prophecy, and shows her to be no less filled with the Holy Ghost than Elisabeth was. We may suppose the blessed virgin to come in, very much *fatigued* with her journey; yet she forgets that, and is inspired with new life, and vigour, and joy, upon the confirmation she here meets with of her faith; and since, by the sudden inspiration and transport, she finds that this was designed to be her errand hither, weary as she is, like Abraham's servant, she would *neither eat nor drink till she had told her errand.*

**1.** Here are the expressions of joy and praise, and God alone the object of the praise and centre of the joy. Some compare this song with that which her name-sake Miriam, the sister of Moses, sung, upon the triumphant departure of Israel out of Egypt, and their triumphant passage through the Red Sea; others think it better compared with the song of Hannah, upon the birth of Samuel, which, like this, passes from a family mercy to a public and general one. *This begins, like that, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord,* ~~1~~ Samuel 2:1. Observe how Mary here speaks of God.

**(1.)** With great reverence of him, as *the Lord:* "*My soul doth magnify the Lord; I never saw him so great as now I find him so good.*" Note, Those, and those only, are *advanced* in mercy, who are thereby brought to think the more *highly* and *honourably* of God; whereas there are those whose

prosperity and preferment make them say, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?* The more honour God has any way put upon us, the more honour we must study to give to him; and *then* only are we accepted in magnifying the Lord, when our *souls* magnify him, and *all that is within us*. Praising work must be soul work.

(2.) With great complacency in him as *her Saviour*: *My spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour*. This seems to have reference to the Messiah, whom she was to be the mother of. She calls him *God her Saviour*; for the angel had told her that he should be the *Son of the Highest*, and that his name should be *Jesus, a Saviour*; this she fastened upon, with application to herself: *He is God my Saviour*. Even the mother of our Lord had need of an interest in him as her Saviour, and would have been undone without it: and she glories more in that happiness which she had in common with all believers than in being his mother, which was an honour peculiar to herself, and this agrees with the preference Christ have to obedient believers above his mother and brethren; see <sup><013></sup>Matthew 12:50; <sup><017></sup>Luke 11:27, 28. Note, Those that have Christ for their God and Saviour have a great deal of reason to rejoice, to *rejoice in spirit*, that is rejoicing as Christ did (<sup><011></sup>Luke 10:21), with spiritual joy.

2. Here are just causes assigned for this joy and praise.

(1.) Upon *her own* account, v. 48, 49.

[1.] *Her spirit rejoiced in the Lord*, because of the *kind* things he had done for her: his *condescension* and *compassion* to her. *He has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden*; that is, he has *looked* upon her *with pity*, for so the word is commonly used. “He has chosen me to this honour, notwithstanding my great meanness, poverty, and obscurity.” Nay, the expression seems to intimate, not only (to allude to that of Gideon, <sup><065></sup>Judges 6:15) that her *family* was poor in Judah, but that she was the *least in her father's house*, as if she were under some particular contempt and disgraced among her relations, was unjustly neglected, and the outcast of the family, and God put this honour upon her, to balance abundantly the contempt. I the rather suggest this, for we find something toward such honour as this put upon others, on the like consideration. Because God saw that Leah *was hated*, he *opened her womb*, <sup><028></sup>Genesis 29:31. Because Hannah was provoked, and made to fret, and insulted over, by Peninnah, therefore God gave her a son, <sup><019></sup>1 Samuel 1:19. Whom men wrongfully depress and despise God doth sometimes, in compassion to them,



especially if they have borne it patiently, prefer and advance; see <sup><Q1E></sup>Judges 11:7. So in Mary's case. And, if God *regards her low estate*, he not only thereby gives a specimen of his favour to the whole race of mankind, whom he *remembers in their low estate*, as the psalmist speaks (<sup><Q1E></sup>Psalm 136:23), but secures a lasting honour to her (for such the honour is that God bestows, honour that fades not away): "*From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed*, shall think me a happy woman and highly advanced." All that embrace Christ and his gospel will say, *Blessed was the womb that bore him and the paps which he sucked*, <sup><Q1E></sup>Luke 11:27. Elizabeth had once and again called her *blessed*: "But that is not all," saith she, "all generations of Gentiles as well as Jews shall call me so."

[2.] Her *soul magnifies* the Lord, because of the *wonderful* things he had done for her (v. 49): *He that is mighty has done to me great things*. A *great* thing indeed, that a *virgin* should *conceive*. A *great* thing indeed, that Messiah, who had been so long promised to the church, and so long expected by the church, should now at length be born. It is the *power of the Highest* that appears in this. She adds, *and holy is his name*; for so Hannah saith her song, *There is none holy as the Lord*, which she explains in the next words, *for there is none beside thee*, <sup><Q1E></sup>1 Samuel 2:2. God is a Being *by himself*, and he manifests himself to be so, especially in the work of our redemption. He that is *mighty*, even he *whose name is holy*, has *done to me great things*. Glorious things may be expected from him that is both *mighty* and *holy*; who *can do every thing*, and *will* do every thing *well* and *for the best*.

(2.) Upon the account of *others*. The virgin Mary, as the mother of the Messiah, is become a kind of public person, wears a public character, and is therefore immediately endued with another spirit, a more public spirit than before she had, and therefore *looks abroad*, looks *about her*, looks *before her*, and takes notice of God's various dealings with the children of men (v. 50, etc.), as Hannah (<sup><Q1E></sup>1 Samuel 2:3, etc.). In this she has especially an eye to the coming of the Redeemer and God's manifesting himself therein.

[1.] It is a certain truth that God *has mercy in store*, mercy in reserve, *for all that have a reverence for his majesty*, and a due regard to his sovereignty and authority. But never did this appear so as in sending his Son into the world to save us (v. 50): *His mercy is on them that fear him*;

it has always been so; he has ever looked upon *them* with an eye of *peculiar favour* who have looked up to him with an eye of *filial fear*. But he hath manifested this *mercy*, so as never before, in sending his Son to bring in an everlasting righteousness, and work out an everlasting salvation, for them that fear him, and this *from generation to generation*; for there are gospel privileges transmitted by entail, and intended for perpetuity. Those that *fear God*, as their Creator and Judge, are encouraged to hope for *mercy in him*, through their Mediator and Advocate; and in him *mercy* is settled upon all that *fear God*, pardoning mercy, healing mercy, accepting mercy, crowning mercy, *from generation to generation*, while the world stands. In Christ he *keepeth mercy for thousands*.

[2.] It has been a common observation that God in his providence puts *contempt* upon the *haughty* and *honour* upon the *humble*; and this he has done remarkably in the whole economy of the work of man's redemption. As God had, with his *mercy* to her, shown himself *mighty* also (v. 48, 49), so he had, with his *mercy on them that fear him*, shown *strength* likewise *with his arm*. *First*, In the course of his providence, it is his usual method to cross *the expectations of men*, and proceed quite otherwise than they promise themselves. *Proud men* expect to carry all before them, to have their way and their will; but he *scatters them in the imagination of their hearts*, breaks their measures, blasts their projects, nay, and brings them low, and brings them down, by those very counsels with which they thought to advance and establish themselves. The *mighty* think to secure themselves by *might in their seats*, but he *puts them down*, and overturns their seats; while, on the other hand, those of *low degree*, who despaired of ever advancing themselves, and thought of no other than of being *ever low*, are wonderfully *exalted*. This observation concerning *honour* holds likewise concerning *riches*; many who were so poor that they had not bread for themselves and their families, by some surprising turn of Providence in favour of them, come to be *filled with good things*; while, on the other hand, those who were rich, and thought no other than that tomorrow should be as this day, that their mountain stood strong and should never be moved, are strangely impoverished, and *sent away empty*. Now this is the same observation that Hannah had made, and enlarged upon, in her song, with application to the case of herself and her adversary (<sup>CHAP</sup>1 Samuel 2:4-7), which very much illustrates this here. And compare also <sup>CHAP</sup>Psalm 107:33-41; 113:7-9; and <sup>CHAP</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:11. God takes a

pleasure in *disappointing* their expectations who promise themselves *great things* in the world, and in *out-doing* the expectations of those who promise themselves but *a little*; as a *righteous* God, it is his glory to *abase* those who *exalt* themselves, and strike terror on the secure; and, as a *good* God, it is his glory to exalt those who humble themselves, and to speak comfort to those who fear before him. *Secondly*, This doth especially appear in the methods of gospel grace.

**1.** In the *spiritual honours* it dispenses. When the proud Pharisees were rejected, and Publicans and sinners went *into the kingdom of heaven* before them, — when the Jews, who *followed after the law of righteousness*, did not attain it, and the Gentiles, who never thought of it, attained to righteousness (Romans 9:30, 31), — when God chose not the *wise men after the flesh*, not the *mighty*, or the *noble*, to preach the gospel, and plant Christianity in the world, but the *foolish* and *weak* things of the world, and things that were despised (1 Corinthians 1:26, 27) — then he *scattered the proud*, and *put down the mighty*, but *exalted them of low degree*. When the tyranny of the chief priests and elders were brought down, who had long *lorded it over God's heritage*, and hoped *always* to do so, and Christ's disciples, a company of poor despised fishermen, by the power they were clothed with, were made to *sit on thrones*, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, — when the power of the four monarchies was broken, and the kingdom of the Messiah, that *stone cut out of the mountain without hands*, is made to *fill the earth*, — then are the *proud scattered*, and those of low degree *exalted*.

**2.** In the *spiritual riches* it dispenses, v. 53.

**(1.)** Those who see their need of Christ, and are importunately desirous of righteousness and life in him, he *fills* with *good things*, with the *best things*; he gives liberally to them, and they are *abundantly satisfied* with the blessings he gives. Those who are weary and heavy-laden shall find rest with Christ, and those who thirst are called to *come to him and drink*; for they only know how to value his gifts. *To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet*, manna is angels' food; and to the *thirsty* fair water is *honey out of the rock*.

**(2.)** Those who are rich, who are not *hungry*, who, like Laodicea, think they have *need of nothing*, are full of themselves and their own righteousness, and think they have a sufficiency in themselves, those

he *sends away* from his door, they are not welcome to him, he sends them *empty* away, they come *full of self*, and are sent away *empty of Christ*. He sends them to the *gods whom they served*, to their own righteousness and strength which they trusted to.

[3.] It was always expected that the Messiah should be, in a special manner, the strength and glory of his people Israel, and so he is in a peculiar manner (v. 54): *He hath helped his servant Israel, antelabeto*. He hath taken them by the hand, and *helped them up* that were fallen and could not help themselves. Those that were sunk under the burdens of a broken covenant of innocency are *helped up* by the blessings of a renewed covenant of grace. The sending of the Messiah, on whom *help* was *laid* for poor sinners, was the greatest kindness that could be done, the greatest help that could be provided for his people Israel, and that which magnifies it is,

*First*, That it is *in remembrance of his mercy*, the mercifulness of his nature, the mercy he has in store for *his servant Israel*. While this blessing was deferred, his people, who waited for it, were often ready to ask, *Has God forgotten to be gracious?* But now he made it appear that he had not forgotten, but *remembered, his mercy*. He remembered his former mercy, and repeated that to them in *spiritual* blessings which he had done formerly to them in *temporal* favours. *He remembered the days of old. Where is he that brought them up out of the sea, out of Egypt?* <sup>2511</sup>Isaiah 63:11. He will do the like again, which that was a type of.

*Secondly*, That it is *in performance of his promise*. It is a mercy not only designed, but declared (v. 55); it was *what he spoke to our fathers*, that the Seed of the woman should break the head of the serpent; that God should dwell in the tents of Shem; and particularly to Abraham, that *in his seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed*, with the best of blessings, with the blessings that are *for ever*, and to the seed that shall be for ever; that is, his *spiritual* seed, for his carnal seed were *cut off* a little after this. Note, What God has spoken he will perform; what he hath spoken to the fathers will be performed to their seed; to their seed's seed, in blessings that shall last for ever.

*Lastly*, Mary's return to Nazareth (v. 56), after she had continued with Elisabeth about *three months*, so long as to be fully satisfied concerning herself that she was *with child*, and to be confirmed therein by her cousin Elisabeth. Some think, though her return is here mentioned before

Elisabeth's being delivered, because the evangelist would finish this passage concerning Mary before he proceeded with the story of Elisabeth, yet that Mary staid till her cousin was (as we say) *down and up again*; that she might attend on her, and be with her in her lying-in, and have her own faith confirmed by the full accomplishment of the promise of God concerning Elisabeth. But most bind themselves to the order of the story as it lies, and think she returned again when Elisabeth was near her time; because she still affected retirement, and therefore would not be there when the birth of this child of promise would draw a great deal of company to the house. Those in whose hearts Christ is formed take more delight than they used to do in *sitting alone and keeping silence*.

## LUKE 1:57-66

### THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

In these verses, we have,

**I.** The birth of John Baptist, v. 57. Though he was conceived in the womb by miracle, he continued in the womb according to the ordinary course of nature (so did our Saviour): *Elisabeth's full time came, that she should be delivered*, and then *she brought forth a son*. Promised mercies are to be expected when the *full time* for them is come, and not before.

**II.** The great joy that was among all the relations of the family, upon this extraordinary occasion (v. 58): *Her neighbours and her cousins heard of it*; for it would be in every body's mouth, as next to miraculous. Dr. Lightfoot observes that Hebron was inhabited by priests of the family of Aaron, and that those were the cousins here spoken of; but the fields and villages about, by the children of Judah, and that those were the *neighbours*. Now these here discovered,

**1.** A *pious* regard to God. They acknowledged that *the Lord had magnified his mercy to her*, so the word is. It was a mercy to have her reproach taken away, a mercy to have her family built up, and the more being a family of *priests*, devoted to God, and employed for him. Many things concurred to make the mercy *great* — that she had been long barren, was now old, but especially that the child should be *great in the sight of the Lord*.

2. A *friendly* regard to Elisabeth. When she rejoiced, they *rejoiced with her*. We ought to take *pleasure* in the prosperity of our neighbours and friends, and to be thankful to God for *their* comforts as for our own.

III. The dispute that was among them concerning the naming him (v. 59): *On the eighth day*, as God has appointed, they *came together*, to *circumcise the child*; it was here, in Hebron, that *circumcision* was first instituted; and Isaac, who, like John Baptist, was born *by promise*, was one of the first that was submitted to it, at least the chief eyed in the institution of it. They that rejoiced in the birth of the child came together to the circumcising of him. Note, The greatest comfort we can take in our children is in *giving them up to God*, and recognizing their covenant-relation to him. The baptism of our children should be more our joy than their birth.

Now it was the custom, when they circumcised their children, to *name them*, because, when *Abram* was circumcised God gave him a new name, and called him *Abraham*; and it is not unfit that they should be left *nameless* till they are by name *given up to God*. Now,

1. *Some* proposed that he should be called by his father's name, *Zacharias*. We have not any instance in scripture that the child should bear the father's name; but perhaps it was of late come into use among the Jews, at it is with us, and they intended hereby to do honour to the father, who was not likely to have another child.

2. The *mother* opposed it, and would have called him *John*; having learned, either by inspiration of the Holy Ghost (as is most probable), or by information in writing from her husband, that God appointed this to be his name (v. 60); He shall be called *Johanan* — *Gracious*, because he shall introduce the gospel of Christ, wherein God's grace shines more brightly than ever.

3. The *relations* objected against that (v. 61): “*There is none of thy kindred*, none of the relations of thy family, *that is called by that name*; and therefore, if he may not have his father's name, yet let him have the name of some of his kindred, who will take it as a piece of respect to have such a *child of wonders* as this named from them.” Note, As those that *have friends* must *show themselves friendly*, so those that have relations must be *obliging* to them in all the usual regards that are paid to *kindred*.

4. They appealed to the *father*, and would try if they could possibly get to know his mind; for it was his office to *name the child*, v. 62. They *made signs* to him, by which it appears that he was *deaf* as well as *dumb*; nay, it should seem, *mindless* of any thing, else one would think they should at first have desired him to write down his child's name, if he had ever communicated any thing by writing since he was *struck*. However, they would carry the matter as far as they could, and therefore gave him to understand what the dispute was which he only could determine; whereupon he made signs to them to give him a *table-book*, such as they then used, and with the pencil he wrote these words, *His name is John*, v. 63. Note, "It shall be so," or, "I would have it so," but "It is so." The matter is determined already; the *angel* had given him that name. Observe, When Zacharias could not *speak*, he *wrote*. When ministers have their mouths stopped, that they cannot preach, yet they may be doing good as long as they have not their hands tied, that they cannot write. Many of the martyrs in prison wrote letters to their friends, which were of great use; blessed Paul himself did so. Zacharias's pitching upon the same name that Elisabeth had chosen was a great surprise to the company: *They marvelled all*; for they knew not that, though by reason of his deafness and dumbness they could not *converse together*, yet they were both guided by *one and the same Spirit*: or perhaps they *marvelled* that he wrote so distinctly and intelligently, which (the stroke he was under being somewhat like that of a palsy) he had not done before.

5. He thereupon recovered the use of his speech (v. 64): *His mouth was opened immediately*. The time prefixed for his being silenced was *till the day that these blessed things shall be fulfilled* (v. 20); not *all the things* going before concerning John's ministry, but those which relate to his birth and name (v. 13). That time was now expired, whereupon the restraint was taken off, and God gave him the *opening of the mouth again*, as he did to Ezekiel, <sup><A127></sup>Ezekiel 3:27. Dr. Lightfoot compares this case of Zacharias with that of Moses, <sup><A128></sup>Exodus 4:24-26. Moses, for distrust, is in danger of his life, as Zacharias, for the same fault, is *struck dumb*; but, upon the circumcision of his child, and recovery of his faith, there, as here, the danger is removed. Infidelity closed his mouth, and now believing opens it again; *he believes, therefore he speaks*. David lay under guilt from the conception of his child till a few days after its birth; then *the Lord takes away his sin*: upon his repentance, he shall not die. So here he shall be no longer dumb; *his mouth was opened, and he spoke, and praised God*.

Note, When God opens our lips, our mouths must *show forth his praise*. As good be without our speech as not use it in *praising God*; for then our tongue is most *our glory* when it is employed for *God's glory*.

6. These things were told all the country over, to the great amazement of all that heard them, v. 65, 66. The sentiments of the people are not to be slighted, but taken notice of. We are here told,

(1.) That *these sayings were discoursed of*, and were the common talk all about the *hill-country of Judea*. It is a pity but a narrative of them had been drawn up, and published in the world, immediately.

(2.) That most people who heard of these things were put into consternation by them: *Fear came on all them that dwell round about* there. If we have not a *good hope*, as we ought to have, built upon the gospel, we may expect that the tidings of it will fill us with *fear*. They believed and trembled, whereas they should have believed and triumphed.

(3.) It raised the expectations of people concerning this child, and obliged them to have their eye upon him, to see what he would come to. They *laid up these presages in their hearts*, treasured them up in mind and memory, as foreseeing they should hereafter have occasion to *recollect* them. Note, What we hear, that may be of use to us, we should *treasure up*, that we may be able to bring forth, for the benefit of others, things new and old, and, when things come to perfection, may be able to look back upon the presages thereof, and to say, "It was what we might expect." They said *within* themselves, and said *among* themselves, "*What manner of child shall this be? What will be the fruit when these are the buds, or rather when the root is out of such a dry ground?*" Note, When children are born into the world, it is very uncertain what they will prove; yet sometimes there have been early indications of something great, as in the birth of Moses, Samson, Samuel, and here of John. And we have reason to think that there were some of those living at the time when John began his public ministry who could, and did, remember these things, and relate them to others, which contributed as much as any thing to the great flocking there was after him.

*Lastly*, It is said, *The hand of the Lord was with him*; that is, he was taken under the special protection of the Almighty, from his birth, as one designed for something great and considerable, and there were many instances of it. It appeared likewise that the Spirit was at work upon his



soul very early. As soon as he began to speak or go, you might perceive something in him very extraordinary. Note, God has ways of operating upon children in their infancy, which we cannot account for. God never made a soul but he knew how to sanctify it.

## LUKE 1:67-80

### THE SONG OF ZACHARIAS

We have here the song wherewith Zacharias *praised God* when his *mouth was opened*; in it he is said to *prophesy* (v. 67), and so he did in the strictest sense of *prophesying*; for he foretold things to come concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, to which all the prophets bear witness. Observe,

**I.** How he was qualified for this: *He was filled with the Holy Ghost*, was endued with more than ordinary measures and degrees of it, for this purpose; he was divinely inspired. God not only *forgave* him his unbelief and distrust (which was signified by discharging him from the punishment of it), but, as a *specimen* of the *abounding* of grace towards believers, he *filled him* with the *Holy Ghost*, and put this honour upon him, to employ him for his honour.

**II.** What the matter of his song was. Here is nothing said of the private concerns of his own family, the rolling away of the reproach from it and putting of a reputation upon it, by the birth of this child, though, no doubt, he found a time to give thanks to God for this, with his family; but in this song he is wholly taken up with the kingdom of the Messiah, and the public blessings to be introduced by it. He could have little pleasure in this *fruitfulness* of his *vine*, and the *hopefulness* of his *olive-plant*, if herein he had not foreseen the *good of Jerusalem, peace upon Israel, and blessings* on both *out of Zion*, <sup>BCRB</sup>Psalm 128:3, 5, 6. The Old-Testament prophecies are often expressed in *praises* and *new songs*, so is the beginning of New-Testament prophecy: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. The God of the whole earth shall he be called*; yet Zacharias, speaking of the work of redemption, called him the *Lord God of Israel*, because to Israel the prophecies, promises, and types, of the redemption had hitherto been given, and to them the first proffers and proposals of it were now to be

made. Israel, as a chosen people, was a type of the *elect of God* out of all nations, whom God had a particular eye to, in sending the Saviour; and therefore he is therein called the *Lord God of Israel*.

Now Zacharias here blesses God,

**1.** For the work of *salvation* that was to be wrought out by the Messiah himself, v. 68-75. This it is that *fills him*, when he is *filled with the Holy Ghost*, and it is that which all who have the *Spirit of Christ* are *full of*.

**(1.)** In sending the Messiah, God has *made a gracious visit* to his people, whom for many ages he had seemed to neglect, and to be estranged from; he hath *visited them* as a friend, to take cognizance of their case. God is said to have *visited* his people in bondage when he *delivered* them (<sup><086></sup>Exodus 3:16; 4:31), to have *visited* his people in famine when he *gave them bread*, <sup><086></sup>Ruth 1:6. He had often sent to them by his prophets, and had still kept up a correspondence with them; but now he himself made them a *visit*.

**(2.)** He has *wrought out redemption* for them: *He has redeemed his people*. This was the errand on which Christ *came into the world*, to redeem those that were sold *for sin*, and sold *under sin*; even God's own people, his Israel, his son, his *first-born*, his *free-born*, need to be *redeemed*, and are undone if they be not. Christ redeems them by *price* out of the hands of God's justice, and redeems them by *power* out of the hands of Satan's tyranny, as Israel out of Egypt.

**(3.)** He has fulfilled the *covenant of royalty* made with the most famous *Old-Testament prince*, that is, David. Glorious things had been said of his family, that on him, as a *mighty one*, *help* should be *laid*, that *his horn should be exalted*, and his *seed* perpetuated, <sup><089></sup>Psalm 89:19, 20, 24, 29. But that family had been long in a manner *cast off* and *abhorred*, <sup><088></sup>Psalm 89:38. Now here it is glorified in, that, according to the promise, the *horn* of David should again be *made to bud*; for, <sup><087></sup>Psalm 132:17, he *hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David* (v. 69), there, where it was promised and expected to arise. David is called God's *servant*, not only as a good man, but as a king that *ruled for God*; and he was an instrument of the *salvation* of Israel, by being employed in the *government* of Israel; so Christ is the *author of eternal redemption to those only that obey him*. There is in Christ, and in him only, *salvation for us*, and it is a *horn of salvation*; for,

[1.] It is an *honourable* salvation. It is *raised up* above all other salvations, none of which are to be compared with it: in it the glory both of the Redeemer and of the redeemed are advanced, and their *horn exalted with honour*.

[2.] It is a *plentiful* salvation. It is a *cornucopia* — a *horn of plenty*, a *salvation* in which we are blessed with *spiritual* blessings, in *heavenly things*, abundantly.

[3.] It is a *powerful* salvation: the strength of the beast is in his *horn*. He has raised up such a salvation as shall *pull down* our spiritual enemies, and *protect* us from them. In the *chariots* of this *salvation* the Redeemer shall go forth, and go on, *conquering and to conquer*.

(4.) He has fulfilled all the precious promises made to the church by the most famous *Old-Testament prophets* (v. 70): *As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets*. His doctrine of salvation by the Messiah is confirmed by an appeal to the prophets, and the greatness and importance of that salvation thereby evidenced and magnified; it is the same that they spoke of, which therefore ought to be expected and welcomed; it is what they *enquired and searched diligently after* (<sup>1</sup>1 Peter 1:10, 11), which therefore ought not to be slighted or thought meanly of. God is now *doing* that which he has long ago *spoken of*; and therefore *be silent, O all flesh, before him*, and attend to him. See,

[1.] How *sacred* the prophecies of this salvation were. The prophets who delivered them were *holy prophets*, who durst not deceive and who aimed at promoting holiness among men; and it was the *holy God* himself that *spoke by* them.

[2.] How *ancient* they were: ever *since the world began*. God having promised, when the world began, that the *Seed of the woman should break the serpent's head*, that promise was echoed to when Adam called his wife's name *Eve* — *Life*, for the sake of that Seed of hers; when Eve called her first son *Cain*, saying, *I have gotten a man from the Lord*, and another son, *Seth*, *settled*; when Noah was called *rest*, and foretold that God should dwell in the tents of *Shem*. And it was not long after the new world began in Noah that the promise was made to Abraham that in his Seed the *nations of the earth* should be *blessed*.

[3.] What a wonderful *harmony* and *concert* we perceive among them. God spoke the same thing by them all, and therefore it is said to be *dia stomatos*, not by the *mouths*, but by the *mouth*, of the prophets, for they all speak of Christ as it were with *one mouth*.

Now what is this *salvation* which was prophesied of?

*First*, It is a *rescue* from the malice of *our enemies*; it is *soterian ex echthron hemon* — a *salvation out of our enemies*, from among them, and *out of the power of them that hate us* (v. 71); it is a *salvation* from sin, and the dominion of Satan over us, both by corruptions within and temptations without. The carnal Jews expected to be delivered from under the Roman yoke, but intimation was betimes given that it should be a redemption of another nature. He shall *save his people from their sins*, that they may not have dominion over them, ~~402~~ Matthew 1:21.

*Secondly*, It is a *restoration* to the *favour of God*; it is to *perform the mercy promised to our forefathers*, v. 72. The Redeemer shall not only break the head of the serpent that was the author of our ruin, but he shall *re-instate* us in the *mercy of God* and *re-establish* us in *his covenant*; he shall bring us as it were into a paradise again, which was signified by the *promises* made to the patriarchs, and the *holy covenant* made with them, *the oath which he sware to our father Abraham*, v. 73. Observe,

**1.** That which was promised to the fathers, and is performed to us, is *mercy*, pure mercy; nothing in it is owing to our *merit* (we deserve wrath and the curse), but all to the *mercy* of God, which *designed* us grace and life: *ex mero motu* — *of his own good pleasure*, he loved us because he would love us.

**2** God herein had an eye to *his covenant*, his *holy covenant*, that covenant with Abraham: *I will be a God to thee and thy seed*. This his seed had *really forfeited* by their transgressions; this he *seemed to have forgotten* in the calamities brought upon them; but he will now *remember* it, will make it appear that he remembers it, for upon that are grounded all his returns of mercy: ~~403~~ Leviticus 26:42, *Then will I remember my covenant*.

*Thirdly*, It is a qualification for, and an encouragement to, the service of God. Thus was *the oath he sware to our Father Abraham*, That he would *give us power and grace to serve him*, in an acceptable manner to him and

a comfortable manner to ourselves, v. 74, 75. Here seems to be an allusion to the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, which, God tells Moses, was in pursuance of the covenant he made with Abraham (<sup><OR6></sup>Exodus 3:6-8), and that this was the design of his bringing them out of Egypt, *that they might serve God upon this mountain*, <sup><OR2></sup>Exodus 3:12. Note, The great design of gospel grace is not to discharge us from, but to engage us to, and encourage us in, the service of God. Under this notion Christianity was always to be looked upon, as intended to make us truly religious, to admit us into the service of God, to bind us to it, and to quicken us in it. We are *therefore* delivered from the iron yoke of sin, that our necks may be put under the sweet and easy yoke of the Lord Jesus. *The very bonds which he has loosed do bind us faster unto him*, <sup><OR6></sup>Psalm 116:16. We are hereby enabled,

- 1.** To serve God *without fear* — *aphobos*. We are *therefore* put into a state of *holy safety* that we might serve God with a *holy security and serenity of mind*, as those that are *quiet from the fears of evil*. God must be served with a *filial fear*, a reverent obedient fear, an awakening quickening fear, but not with a *slavish fear*, like that of the slothful servant, who represented him to himself as a *hard master*, and unreasonable; not with that fear that has *torment and amazement* in it; not with the fear of a legal spirit; a *spirit of bondage*, but with the boldness of an evangelical spirit, *a spirit of adoption*.
- 2.** To serve him in *holiness and righteousness*, which includes the whole duty of man towards God and our neighbour. It is both the intention and the direct tendency of the gospel to renew upon us that image of God in which man was at first made, which consisted in *righteousness and true holiness*, <sup><OR4></sup>Psalm 50:14.
- 3.** To serve him, *before him*, in the duties of his *immediate* worship, wherein we present ourselves *before the Lord*, to serve him as those that have an eye always upon him, and see his eye always upon us, upon our inward man, that is serving him *before him*.
- 4.** To serve him *all the days of our life*. The design of the gospel is to engage us in constancy and perseverance in the service of God, by showing us how much depends upon our not drawing back, and by showing us how Christ *loved us to the end*, and thereby engaged us to *love him to the end*.

2. He *blessed God* for the work of *preparation* for this salvation, which was to be done by John Baptist (v. 76): *Thou child*, though now but a child of eight days' old, shalt be called *the prophet of the Highest*. Jesus Christ is *the Highest*, for he is *God over all, blessed for evermore* (<sup>495</sup>Romans 9:5), equal with the Father. John Baptist was *his prophet*, as Aaron was Moses's prophet (<sup>200</sup>Exodus 7:1); what he said was as his mouth, what he did was as his harbinger. Prophecy had now long ceased, but in John it *revived*, as it had done in Samuel, who was born of an aged mother, as John was, after a long cessation. John's business was,

(1.) To prepare people for the salvation, by preaching repentance and reformation as great gospel duties: *Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord*, and but a little before him, to *prepare his ways*, to call people to make room for him, and get ready for his entertainment. Let every thing that may obstruct his progress, or embarrass it, or hinder people from coming to him, be taken away: see <sup>340</sup>Isaiah 40:3, 4. Let *valleys be filled*, and *hills be brought low*.

(2.) To give people a general idea of the salvation, that they might know, not only what to do, but what to expect; for the doctrine he preached was that the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand. There are two things in which you must know that this salvation consists: —

[1.] The *forgiveness* of what we have *done amiss*. It is salvation by the *remission of sins*, those sins which stand in the way of the salvation, and by which we are all become liable to ruin and condemnation, v. 77. John Baptist gave people to understand that, though their case was sad, by reason of sin, it was not desperate, for pardon might be obtained *through the tender mercy of our God* (the *bowels of mercy*, so the word is): there was nothing in us but a *piteous case* to recommend us to the divine compassion.

[2.] *Direction to do better* for the time to come. The gospel salvation not only encourages us to hope that the works of darkness shall be forgiven us, but sets up a clear and true light, by which we may order our steps aright. In it *the day-spring hath visited us from on high* (v. 78); and this also is owing to the *tender mercy of our God*. Christ is *anatole* — *the morning Light*, the *rising Sun*, <sup>300</sup>Malachi 4:2. The gospel brings *light* with it (<sup>495</sup>John 3:19), leaves us not to wander in the darkness of Pagan ignorance, or in the moonlight of the Old-Testament types or figures, but in it the day dawns; in John Baptist it began to break, but increased apace,

and *shone more and more to the perfect day*. We have as much reason to welcome the gospel day who enjoy it as those have to welcome the morning who had long waited for it. *First*, The gospel is *discovering*; it shows us that which before we were utterly in the dark about (v. 79); it is to *give light to them that sit in darkness*, the *light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*; the day-spring visited this dark world to *lighten the Gentiles*, <sup><4038></sup>Acts 26:18. *Secondly*, It is *reviving*; it brings light to them that sit *in the shadow of death*, as condemned prisoners in the dungeon, to bring them the tidings of a *pardon*, at least of a *reprieve* and opportunity of procuring a pardon; it proclaims the *opening of the prison* (<sup><2611></sup>Isaiah 61:1), brings the *light of life*. How pleasant is that light! *Thirdly*, It is *directing*; it is to *guide our feet in the way of peace*, into that way which will bring us to peace at last. It is not only a light *to our eyes*, but a light *to our feet* (<sup><4305></sup>Psalms 119:105); it guides us into the way of making our peace with God, of keeping up a comfortable communion; that *way of peace* which as sinners we have wandered from and *have not known* (<sup><4317></sup>Romans 3:17), nor could ever have known of ourselves.

In the last verse, we have short account of the younger years of John Baptist. Though he was the son of a priest, he did not, like Samuel, go up, when he was a child, to minister before the Lord; for he was to prepare the way for a better priesthood. But we are here told,

**1.** Of his *eminence* as to the *inward man*: The *child grew* in the capacities of his mind, much more than other children; so that he *waxed strong in the spirit*; had a strong judgment and strong resolution. Reason and conscience (both which are the candle of the Lord) were so strong in him that he had the inferior faculties of appetite and passion in complete subjection betimes. By this it appeared that he was betimes *filled with the Holy Ghost*; for those that are strong in the Lord are *strong in spirit*.

**2.** Of his *obscurity* as to the *outward man*: He *was in the deserts*; not that he lived a hermit; cut off from the society of men. No, we have reason to think that he went up to Jerusalem at the *feasts*, and frequented the synagogues on the sabbath day, but his constant residence was in some of those scattered houses that were in the wilderness of Zuph or Maon, which we read of in the story of David. There he spent most of his time, in contemplation and devotion, and had not his education in the schools, or at the feet of the rabbin. Note, Many a one is qualified for great usefulness,

who yet is buried alive; and many are so long buried who are designed, and are thereby in the fitting, for so much greater usefulness at last; as John Baptist, who was *in the desert* only *till the day of his showing to Israel*, when he was in the thirtieth year of his age. Note, There is a time fixed for the *showing* of those favours to Israel which are reserved; *the vision of them is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak, and shall not lie.*