

As this is the last Sunday before Christmas we are going to focus on the birth of a baby, but rather surprisingly it is the birth of John the Baptist. But the surprises do not end there, because the birth of John himself was something of a surprise given his parents were so old (Luke 1vv7). But there is another surprise too, because even though Zechariah has just witnessed his wife give birth to their son, John, and even though he has been mute throughout the pregnancy, the child he speaks of when his tongue is loosed, is not John, but Jesus.

And in Zechariah's words, we find 3 reasons to praise God this Christmas time...

1. Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promises (vv68-75)

These verses remind us that God promised that he would visit, redeem, and save his people, and that in fact this great plan of salvation is now being put into effect, and yet v69 makes it clear that this powerful saviour is in the line of David. It is Jesus Christ, that Zechariah is speaking of.

And this is why as Christians we celebrate Christmas. Because we know that in Jesus being born on this earth, it was the beginning of the fulfilment of God's promises to his people.

It was the beginning of God's salvation. It was God acting decisively to save his people, to save us. So it is great news, and a great comfort also, to be reminded that God is not random, or unfaithful. He is the God who makes a promise and brings it to fulfilment.

As Zechariah says... 'Praise be to the Lord'.

2. Jesus brings forgiveness of sins (vv76-79)

Finally, Zechariah turns his attention to his newborn son, and in vv76-77 we get John's job description: he is to tell people how they can be saved, how they can have their sins forgiven. In other words he is to get them ready for the arrival of Jesus.

John is to testify to the great work that Jesus is to accomplish. John will inform people, tell people, fill them in on what salvation is all about, tell them that their sins can be forgiven. He will prepare the people.

But John is not the one who will accomplish it. Forgiveness of sin, forgiveness of our sins is accomplished only by Jesus. It's Jesus who saves us.

Are we willing to freely receive forgiveness of our sins?

Do we praise God for it?

... Because of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven, if we trust in him.

As Zechariah says... 'Praise be to the Lord'.

3. Forgiven people are saved to serve (v79, cf v74-75)

People can think that Christianity is like Christmas afternoon... everything is done so you just sit back in a comfy chair, receive forgiveness, put your feet up and fall asleep.

But that just is not true.

It is true that our sins **will be** forgiven if we trust in Jesus, but we are also called to follow a path.

You see the purpose of us being saved, God's plan for our salvation, is that we can now follow him.

Before (v79), we were in darkness and we could not see the path, but the light has come and now we can see where we are to walk.

As v74 we are saved so that we may serve the Lord Almighty - what a privilege!

As Zechariah says... 'Praise be to the Lord'.