Zachariah's Prophecies
Luke 1:57,67-79
SS Lesson for 12/15/2013

Devotional Scripture: Mal 3:1-4; Isa 40:3-11

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND APPROACH TO LESSON

Key Verse: Luke 1:76-77
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary
Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator
Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

PROPHECY OF THE REDEEMER (LUKE 1:57,67-71)

Zacharias told of John as a Prophet of the redeemer (57,67)

John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)
A prophet that was prophesied (Luke 1:76)
A prophet especially commissioned (from Adam Clarke's Commentary)
A prophet whose prediction had more clarity (from Barnes' Notes)
Even the people of his day considered John a prophet (Matt 14:5)
John was the fulfillment of the prophet Elijah (Matt 17:11-13)
A prophet that was giving authority from Heaven (Matt 21:24-27)

A redeemer that was the horn of salvation (69)

Horn of salvation (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)
A horn of salvation that was anointed (1 Sam 2:10)
A horn of salvation that is a refuge (Ps 18:2)
A horn of salvation that is out of the lineage of David (Ps 132:17)
A horn of salvation that acknowledges and proves that God is the Lord God (Ezek 29:21)

A redeemer prophesied from the beginning (70)

Propesied that through Jesus all nations would be blessed (Gen 12:3)
Propesied that Jesus would be a ruler from Judah's lineage (Gen 49:10)
Propesies about Jesus were throughout the Scriptures (Luke 24:27)
Propesies through the prophets of old as promises (Acts 3:21-22)
Propesied through an oath to David (Ps 132:11)
Propesied that Jesus would be a righteous branch (Jer 33:14-15)

A redeemer who saves from the enemy (71)

Saved from national enemies (Isa 14:1-2)
A salvation from enemies that should be worthy of worship (2 Kings 17:39)
A salvation from enemies that should be worthy of praise (Ps 18:3)

PROPHECY OF THE NEW COVENANT (LUKE 1:72-75)

A covenant remembered (72)

Promises, Promises (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)
Remembered for a thousand generations (Ps 105:8)
Remembered for the people's sake (Ps 106:44-46)
Remembered because the people feared God (Ps 111:5)
Remembered because the covenant was established as everlasting (Ezek 16:59-60)
Remembered because God is faithful and cannot disown Himself (2 Tim 2:13)

A covenant that has been sworn by God (73)

An oath that puts an end to all arguments because God cannot lie (Heb 6:16-18)
An oath that is based on a promise (Gal 3:17-18)
An oath that is confirmed because God does not change His mind (Heb 7:20-22)
An oath from God, and there is no one greater (Heb 6:13)

A covenant of deliverance (74)
- Deliverance from fear into sonship (Rom 8:15)
- Deliverance from sin (John 8:31-36)
- Deliverance that is continual and proven (2 Cor 1:10)
- Deliverance from all troubles (Ps 34:19)
- Deliverance from trials (2 Peter 2:9)
- Deliverance that is part of the new covenant (Heb 9:15)

A covenant of holiness and righteousness (75)
- Holy and righteous because of the cleansing by Jesus' sacrifice (Heb 9:12-14)
- Holy and righteous because of the power of Jesus' blood (Heb 12:24)
- Holy and righteous because God is holy (1 Peter 1:14-16)
- Holy and righteous because Christians are called to be holy (1 Cor 1:2)
- Holy and righteous because God chose Christians to be holy and blameless (Eph 1:4)
- Holy and righteous because of reconciliation (Col 1:22)
- Holy and righteous because God enables His people to live holy lives (1 Thess 4:7)

PROPHECY OF A PROCLAIMER WHO WILL PREPARE THE WAY (LUKE 1:76-79)

The proclaimer's title (76)
- People considered John a prophet (Matt 14:5)
- The Jews were afraid that John's prophecy was from Heaven (Matt 21:24-26)
- Commentary on John's title from Barnes Notes
- Commentary on John's title from Adam Clarke

The proclaimer's mission (77-79)
- Knowledge of salvation (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)
- Mission to provide knowledge of salvation (77)
  - Knowledge that Jesus is the light that must be believed in (John 1:7)
  - Knowledge that Jesus is the Christ and is above all (John 3:26-31)
  - Knowledge that John only baptized for repentance, but Jesus baptized for salvation (Acts 19:4)
- Mission to present the One who shines on those living in darkness (78)
  - The One who is the great light (Matt 4:12-16)
  - The One that gives light to every man (John 1:9)
  - The One who is the light of the world (John 8:12)
  - The One who the light that children of light live in (Eph 5:8)
  - The One who is light in which there is no darkness (1 John 1:5)
- Mission to guide feet into the way of peace (79)
  - Peace that is eternal and keeps away fear (John 14:27)
  - Peace with God that comes through Jesus (Rom 5:1)
  - Peace that comes from a mind that is controlled by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:6)
  - Peace that is part of the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHT FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH
CONCLUSION FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY
PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR
Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson teaches about Zacharias’s Prophecies. The study’s aim is to demonstrate that God is true to His Word and actively working out His Will. The study’s application is to challenge believers to be a people of praise because of what God is doing.

Key Verse: Luke 1:76-77

76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

This psalm, known as “the Benedictus,” is filled with Old Testament quotations and allusions. Zechariah expounded four ideas. 1. Zechariah gave an exhortation to praise... God (v. 68a). 2. Zechariah noted the reason God should be praised—He has come and has redeemed His people (v. 68b). 3. Zechariah described the deliverance for Israel through the Messiah (vv. 69-75). The Messiah was to be Israel’s horn of salvation (v. 69). The horns of an animal symbolized its power. Thus the Messiah would be strong and would deliver the nations from her enemies (v. 74). Of special import in these verses is the mention of His holy covenant, the oath God swore to our father Abraham (vv. 72-73; cf. Gen. 22:16-18). 4. Zechariah prophetically described the ministry John would have (Luke 1:76-79). Zechariah had understood the message of the angel, so he foretold that John would be the one to go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him (cf. Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1). He would be a prophet of the Most High (Luke 1:76; cf. v. 32). Verse 77 may refer to the Lord rather than to John. However, John did preach the same message of forgiveness of... sins (cf. 3:3).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Zacharias's prophecy came amidst a unique set of circumstances—those surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus. Remember that Zacharias was struck mute when he did not readily accept the prophecy that he and his wife would have a child. Being older, it did not seem possible that they would have a child. And that they would have a child who would have great purpose in God's plan probably seemed just as difficult to believe (Luke 1:13-20). Having much doubt, Zacharias made the mistake of asking the angel for a sign. Well, he got one! The sign he received was that he was to remain mute for the entire duration of Elisabeth's pregnancy—until God brought the prophecy to pass. And then, upon confession of the name of his son, Zacharias's tongue was loosened to speak. This special son became a crucial figure of the Gospels—John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord. When Zacharias's tongue was finally loosened, what did he speak about? What did he have to say? As the Scripture shows, the subject of his prophecy was the messianic gift that was coming into the world. Being filled with the Spirit, Zacharias praised God for the One who was coming. He characterized it as a divine visitation. Our text concerns the unique role of Zacharias's son, John the Baptist, in this plan. What was this role? First of all, Zacharias declared John's office. John the Baptist was to become a prophet of the Most High, the last in a long line of Old Testament prophes. He was given the task of speaking for God, as were all the prophets. John's unique role was to speak for God right on the threshold of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus—a very high privilege and sacred duty. Then John's task or mission was outlined more specifically. He was to go before the Lord, preparing the way. John's unique ministry was to bear witness of the Lord Jesus and to prepare people spiritually for their own encounter with the Saviour. In this he became a model for all of us. All who believe in and follow the Lord are given the task to bear witness and to prepare hearts for the Lord Jesus. Finally, Zacharias spoke of the content of John's message. It was to be a messianic message. The Lord Jesus would be all about granting salvation to sinners, delivering them from the penalty of sin. There is no way to escape it—the ministry of the Lord Jesus was and is a ministry of salvation.
During the Christmas season, we are bombarded with a million different messages and ideas. It is hard to keep the proper focus. We are surrounded by snowmen, reindeer, parties, and programs. But the message of the season is that Jesus was sent into the world to save sinners. Zacharias's prophecy takes us right back to the basics. We see the prophecy of his unique son, born to unsuspecting parents. We see why he came and what he was to do for God. And it all leads us back to the good news that God sent His Son into the world to save sinners, This is the truth of Christmas.

**Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson**

The outline of the lesson was adapted from a previous SS Lesson dated 12/16/2007 and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people</td>
<td>Prophecy of the Redeemer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant</td>
<td>Prophecy of the New Covenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways</td>
<td>Prophecy a Proclaimer Who Will Prepare the Way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lesson Introduction and Background**

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Only God knows the future. And only he can give us the kind of future that is truly worthwhile. God announced his plans for the future through prophets. God's prophets were more than mere human experts who could use personal expertise to project a likely future. God spoke through them to announce authoritatively what he would do to bring his will to reality. God promised to bring about a future that would bless his people in ways that exceeded their hopes. In so doing God invited his people to trust him, to look forward patiently in faith. Alongside the promised blessing came a warning: those who did not submit themselves to the God who controls the future would be judged as his enemies. Though we commonly think of prophets in terms of the Old Testament, God continued to speak through prophets in the New Testament. At the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah (his father) spoke in a way that recalled the great prophets of the Old Testament. In so doing, Zechariah prophesied that God was beginning the long-awaited time of fulfillment. John's birth signaled the start an important transition by God. Today's text forms the climax to the prophecy of John the Baptist's birth. Zechariah, an elderly, childless priest, had received from God's angel a pledge that he would become the father of a son who would announce the fulfillment of God's promises. Zechariah responded with disbelief; as a cautionary sign of judgment, God rendered him unable to speak for a time (Luke 1:5-22). Zechariah's ultimate reaction, like Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55, lesson 2), is a poetic expression of praise to God. Employing parallel expressions typical of biblical poetry, Zechariah's song echoes key themes of prophetic promise from Israel's Scriptures. As God had fulfilled his surprising promise that Zechariah would become a father, so God would fulfill his greatest promises for all.

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*
Prophesy of the Redeemer (Luke 1:57,67-71)

57 Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.
67 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:
68 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people,
69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,
70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began,
71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us,

Zacharias told of John as a Prophet of the redeemer (57,67)

John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

John is the direct announcer of the Messiah. In this he fulfills the message in Malachi 3:1, a fact that Jesus affirms. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and Jesus further affirms this in verse 14. (See also Matthew 17:10–13; Luke 1:17.) John’s whole ministry has been a flaming prediction and testimony concerning the Christ who was coming to take away the sins of the world. Many have misunderstood the God-designed nature of the Messiah’s kingdom and have tried to make it something different. Their forceful efforts will not change its spiritual design. John does not become a part of that kingdom; he died before its beginning. Thus Jesus said, “He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11). We have the privilege of serving in the kingdom that John could not. Let us be as faithful to our opportunity as John was to his.

A prophet that was prophesied (Luke 1:76)

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

A prophet especially commissioned (from Adam Clarke's Commentary)

That is, one more excellent than a prophet; one greatly beyond all who had come before him, being the immediate forerunner of Christ, and who was especially commissioned to prepare the way of the Lord. He was a prophet, a teacher, a man divinely commissioned to point out Jesus and his salvation; and more excellent than any of the old prophets, because he not only pointed out this Christ, but saw him, and had the honour of dying for that sacred truth which he steadily believed and boldly proclaimed.

A prophet whose prediction had more clarity (from Barnes' Notes)

Sustaining a character more elevated and sacred than the most distinguished of the ancient prophets. Those had been regarded as the most eminent of the prophets who had most clearly predicted the Messiah. Isaiah had been distinguished above all others for the sublimity of his writings, and the clearness with which he had foretold the coming of Christ. Yet John surpassed even him. He lived in the time of the Messiah himself. He predicted his coming with still more clarity. He was the instrument of introducing him to the nation. He was, therefore, first among the prophets.

Even the people of his day considered John a prophet (Matt 14:5)

5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

John was the fulfillment of the prophet Elijah (Matt 17:11-13)

11 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. 12 But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.
A prophet that was giving authority from Heaven (Matt 21:24-27)

24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men'-we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

A redeemer that was the horn of salvation (69)

Horn of salvation (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

The horn of salvation is a figure of speech from the world of animal husbandry. Here the reference must be to Jesus and not to John, because Jesus is the One who traces his ancestry back through King David. See also Psalm 132:17.

A horn of salvation that was anointed (1 Sam 2:10)

10 those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

A horn of salvation that is a refuge (Ps 18:2)

2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

A horn of salvation that is out of the lineage of David (Ps 132:17)

17 Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one.

A horn of salvation that acknowledges and proves that God is the Lord God (Ezek 29:21)

21 "On that day I will make a horn grow for the house of Israel, and I will open your mouth among them. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

A redeemer prophesied from the beginning (70)

Prophesied that through Jesus all nations would be blessed (Gen 12:3)

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Prophesied that Jesus would be a ruler from Judah's lineage (Gen 49:10)

10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

Prophesies about Jesus were throughout the Scriptures (Luke 24:27)

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Prophesied through the prophets of old as promises (Acts 3:21-22)

21 He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.
**Prophecies through an oath to David** (Ps 132:11)

11 The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne--

**Prophecy that Jesus would be a righteous branch** (Jer 33:14-15)

14 "'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. 15 'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.

**A redeemer who saves from the enemy (71)**

**Saved from national enemies** (Isa 14:1-2)

The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob. 2 Nations will take them and bring them to their own place. And the house of Israel will possess the nations as menservants and maidservants in the LORD's land. They will make captives of their captors and rule over their oppressors.

**A salvation from enemies that should be worthy of worship** (2 Kings 17:39)

39 Rather, worship the LORD your God; it is he who will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies."

A **salvation from enemies that should be worthy of praise** (Ps 18:3)

3 I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

**Prophecy of the New Covenant (Luke 1:72-75)**

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

**A covenant remembered (72)**

**Promises, Promises** (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Every time he got an offer for a new credit card, he accepted it. And every time he bought something, he charged it. His credit card debt soared. He promised to pay but he never did. He dismissed it by saying, "I’m the most promising young man in town. I promise to pay for this and I promise to pay for that.” The promises of people may not always be kept, but God’s always are. He is in this sense “more promising” than we are. His promises are greater and his promises are sure to be kept. That’s why when we sing that old song “Standing on the Promises,” we note the last words of the refrain: we’re “standing on the promises of God.” Those are the only promises on which we can truly stand. The promises of people often fail. You cannot stand on them. Some people never intend to keep their promises in the first place. Some intend to keep them but are prevented by circumstances beyond their control. But God intends to keep his promises, and he has the resources necessary to do so. Sometimes we dismiss the assurances that come from people and say cynically, “Promises! Promises!” But no one can dismiss God’s promises with such cynicism. Today’s lesson shows that it does not matter how old a promise is. God will keep it. You can see it in the Bible. You can see it in life. He may delay the keeping of the promise. He may keep it in a way we do not expect. But we may be certain God’s promises will be kept.
Remembered for a thousand generations  (Ps 105:8)
8 He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,

Remembered for the people's sake  (Ps 106:44-46)
44 But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; 45 for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented. 46 He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.

Remembered because the people feared God  (Ps 111:5)
5 He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.

Remembered because the covenant was established as everlasting  (Ezek 16:59-60)
59 "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. 60 Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.

Remembered because God is faithful and cannot disown Himself  (2 Tim 2:13)
13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

A covenant that has been sworn by God (73)

An oath that puts an end to all arguments because God cannot lie (Heb 6:16-18)
16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

An oath that is based on a promise  (Gal 3:17-18)
17 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. 18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

An oath that is confirmed because God does not change His mind  (Heb 7:20-22)
21 but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" 22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

An oath from God, and there is no one greater  (Heb 6:13)
13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,

A covenant of deliverance (74)

Deliverance from fear into sonship  (Rom 8:15)
15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."
Deliverance from sin (John 8:31-36)

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"
34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Deliverance that is continual and proven (2 Cor 1:10)

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

Deliverance from all troubles (Ps 34:19)

19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

Deliverance from trials (2 Peter 2:9)

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Deliverance that is part of the new covenant (Heb 9:15)

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

A covenant of holiness and righteousness (75)

Holy and righteous because of the cleansing by Jesus' sacrifice (Heb 9:12-14)

12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.
14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Holy and righteous because of the power of Jesus' blood (Heb 12:24)

24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Holy and righteous because God is holy (1 Peter 1:14-16)

15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Holy and righteous because Christians are called to be holy (1 Cor 1:2)

2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-their Lord and ours:

Holy and righteous because God chose Christians to be holy and blameless (Eph 1:4)

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love
Holy and righteous because of reconciliation  (Col 1:22)
22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-

Holy and righteous because God enables His people to live holy lives  (1 Thess 4:7)
7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Prophecy of a Proclaimer Who Will Prepare the Way (Luke 1:76-79)

76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,
77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,
78 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;
79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

The proclaimer's title (76)

People considered John a prophet (Matt 14:5)
5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

The Jews were afraid that John's prophecy was from Heaven (Matt 21:24-26)
24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism-where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men'-we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

Commentary on John's title from Barnes Notes
John was considered a Prophet of God; a prophet "appointed by God" to declare his will, and to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The Lord Jesus, the Messiah, that was about to appear. To go before "the face of one" is the same as to go IMMEDIATELY before one, or to be IMMEDIATELY followed by another.

Commentary on John's title from Adam Clarke
John's title constituted his dignity in that he was to be called (constituted) a prophet of the Most High. Prophet has two acceptations: first, a person who foretells future events. Secondly, a teacher of men in the things of God. John was a prophet in both senses: he proclaimed the mercy which should be communicated announced the baptism of the Holy Spirit; and taught men how to leave their sins, and how to find the salvation of God.

The proclaimer's mission (77-79)

Knowledge of salvation (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)
At this point Zechariah's emphasis on salvation turns from the political theme (see v. 71, above) to the spiritual one. The phrase knowledge of salvation expresses the need for God's people not just to know "about" salvation, but to know it through experiencing it. This salvation will permit God's people to escape their sins. Forgiveness of sins will characterize the message of John's ministry (cf. Luke 3:1-3).
**Mission to provide knowledge of salvation (77)**

*Knowledge that Jesus is the light that must be believed in (John 1:7)*

7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.

*Knowledge that Jesus is the Christ and is above all (John 3:26-31)*

26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." 27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less. 31 "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.

*Knowledge that John only baptized for repentance, but Jesus baptized for salvation (Acts 19:4)*

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

**Mission to present the One who shines on those living in darkness (78)**

*The One who is the great light (Matt 4:12-16)*

12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali- 14 to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 15 "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles- 16 the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

*The One that gives light to every man (John 1:9)*

9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

*The One who is the light of the world (John 8:12)*

12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

*The One who the light that children of light live in (Eph 5:8)*

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

*The One who is light in which there is no darkness (1 John 1:5)*

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

**Mission to guide feet into the way of peace (79)**

*Peace that is eternal and keeps away fear (John 14:27)*

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

*Peace with God that comes through Jesus (Rom 5:1)*

5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

*Peace that comes from a mind that is controlled by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:6)*

6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

*Peace that is part of the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17)*
17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh


Verse 80 serves as the conclusion to Luke’s account of the birth and childhood of John the Baptist. In my opinion, it is the key to understanding our text:
And the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel (Luke 1:80). Here, Luke gives us his reason for including the account of John’s childhood, even though his public ministry was to begin many years later. In addition, Luke here informs us as to his reason for including the account of the “family feud” in conjunction with the naming of John. Let me point out several important elements in this very brief concluding statement.

(1) This statement capsulizes and summarizes the entire period of John’s life prior to his public ministry. In less than 30 words, approximately 30 years of John’s life are characterized.

(2) This statement speaks of John’s physical, but especially of his spiritual growth during his growing-up years. Luke tells us that John “became strong in spirit.”

(3) This statement speaks of John’s preparation for public ministry. While John’s physical and spiritual growth is of great importance to his own walk with God, Luke’s purpose is to inform us that he was being prepared for the day of his public appearance, for the time of his public ministry as the forerunner of Messiah. In other words, John’s spiritual growth was essential for his spiritual ministry.

(4) Finally, and most importantly, Luke informs us that John was being prepared for his public ministry in solitude. John’s spiritual growth and development, Luke tells us, took place “in the deserts.” I do not think that John’s living in the desert was incidental to his spiritual growth and development, but that it was a fundamental part of his growth process. Luke, as a meticulous and thoughtful historian, was a man who thought in terms of processes, and who saw history revealing a continuity, because behind it all God is bringing about His purposes and fulfilling His promises. Thus, for Luke, the ministries of John and Jesus did not commence at their public presentation, but at the time of the announcement of their births. Luke is concerned that we see the formulating factors in their ministries, which took place in their earliest years, as well as the ministries which resulted. And so while the other gospel writers begin with the public proclamation of John’s message, Luke begins with the angelic announcement of John’s birth, and with the experiences in John’s life which shaped him spiritually, in preparation for his ministry. Luke informs us of several preparatory factors in the life of John, even in this very brief account of his birth and childhood. First, Luke tells us of John’s calling, as indicated by the announcement of Gabriel, before the child was even conceived. God’s purpose for John was announced, even before his conception, so that his parents might raise him in the light of those purposes, thus helping to prepare him for this ministry. Second, John was filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth, so that his spiritual growth would be enhanced, during his childhood, in preparation for his ministry. Finally, John was prepared for his ministry by being separated from his family, culture, and religious system.

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Conclusion from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Speechless for nine months, Zechariah offered an impressive, memorable song in celebration of John's birth. Layering phrase after phrase from the ancient prophets, he made clear to all that the time of fulfillment had arrived. We are the beneficiaries of those promises and their fulfillment. We can know the promises and the gospel story that brings them to reality. We experience the salvation, mercy, knowledge, and light that God
gives in Jesus Christ. Our expression of joy and thanks ought to be at least as vivid as Zechariah’s, if not more so.

**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. God's Word is totally reliable (Luke 1:57; cf. vs. 13)
2. God's redeeming grace should cause us to praise Him (vss. 67-68)
3. God miraculously used Old Testament prophets to speak His truth (vss. 69-70)
4. The eternal God keeps His Holy Word intact despite the passing of time (vss. 71-73)
5. God's Word brings the message of salvation to us (Luke 1:74-75; cf. Rom. 10:9-17)
6. God uses believers to be witnesses for Him of His forgiveness and grace (Luke 1:76-79)