

Zacharias, Speaks

Devotional Reading: [Malachi 4:1–6](#)

Background Scripture: [Luke 1:57–80](#)

Luke 1:57–66, 76–79

57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of

Judaea.

66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Key Text

Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.

—**Luke 1:76**

From Darkness to Light

Unit 1: God's Preparation

Lessons 1-4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the significant events that occurred during the first eight days of the life of John the Baptist.
2. Explain elements of cause and effect regarding the reactions of neighbors and relatives.
3. Identify one way he or she can help prepare someone's heart to receive the Lord.

Lesson Outline

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III. Promise-Filled Song (Luke 1:76–79)

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A. Dramatic Praise

B. Thought to Remember

C. Prayer

How to Say It

| | |
|------------|-------------------------|
| Benedictus | <i>Ben-eh-dik-tus.</i> |
| Jerusalem | <i>Juh-roo-suh-lem.</i> |
| Judaea | <i>Joo-dee-uh.</i> |
| Malachi | <i>Mal-uh-kye.</i> |
| Septuagint | <i>Sep-too-ih-jent.</i> |
| Zealots | <i>Zel-uts.</i> |

Introduction

A. Dramatic Pause

Skilled performers and communicators will harness the power of an aptly timed silence to capture the attention of their audience. Musicians might stop playing for two beats before playing the next section of music. Actors might stand in silence for an extended moment before continuing their dialogue. Magicians might pause to build the audience's sense of anticipation before revealing the illusion's climax. Preachers might take a silent breath after reading Scripture, allowing the congregation time to consider Scripture's imperatives. A well-timed, sometimes dramatic pause has the power to affect audiences.

The power of a dramatic pause comes in what follows the pause; silence frequently precedes the high point. Today's Scripture text continues a dramatic pause that began in the last lesson. We will understand how this pause highlights the fulfillment of God's promises to a family and to the whole world.

B. Lesson Context

The first chapters of Luke’s Gospel tell the stories of two important births. Luke presents the events surrounding the births of John and Jesus in a way that connects them to each other. In both accounts, the angel Gabriel announced an approaching pregnancy and promised birth. Gabriel first appeared to a priest named Zacharias and prophesied regarding the pregnancy of his wife, Elisabeth, and the birth of their son, John ([Luke 1:8–19](#); see [lesson 1](#)). Then the angel appeared to Mary and announced that she was “highly favoured” in the eyes of God ([1:28](#)) and that she would give birth to a son ([1:31–33](#)).

Mary and Elisabeth were related ([Luke 1:36](#)). Later, when Mary visited Elisabeth, the unborn John “leaped” in his mother’s womb, and Elisabeth “was filled with the Holy Ghost” ([1:41](#)). Elisabeth proclaimed her relative to be blessed because of Mary’s demonstration of faith and belief in God’s words through Gabriel ([1:45](#)). The proclamation led Mary to rejoice through a song of worshipful adoration and prophetic expectation ([1:46–56](#), [lesson 4](#)). Luke’s Gospel emphasizes God’s work in the world by way of Elisabeth, Mary, and their experiences while pregnant.

This lesson’s Scripture depicts the second half of a type of pause that affected John’s father. When Zacharias received Gabriel’s revelation regarding Elisabeth’s pregnancy, he questioned whether God’s promise could come true (see [Luke 1:18](#), [lesson 1](#)). Gabriel gave a sign to Zacharias: he would be mute until Gabriel’s words were fulfilled ([1:19–20](#)). Zacharias would have to endure this sign for the length of Elisabeth’s pregnancy.

Elisabeth recognized that God was at work in and through her pregnancy. She proclaimed that “the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men” ([Luke 1:25](#)). Would Zacharias feel the same on the other side of his dramatic pause?

I. Joyous Occasion

(Luke 1:57–63)

A. Birth of a Son (vv. 57–58)

57. Now Elisabeth’s full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

Beyond Zacharias’s and Elisabeth’s interactions with the crowds and with Mary (see Luke 1:21–22, 39–45), Luke’s Gospel does not provide further insight regarding any other interactions they had with others. Whether others knew of Elisabeth’s pregnancy or Zacharias’s loss of speech is unknown. Elisabeth’s seclusion for five months (1:24) may have contributed to Luke’s silence regarding this period.

Luke’s sparse narration until this point focuses the reader’s attention on the fulfillment of Gabriel’s promise to Zacharias. After the *full time* of Elisabeth’s pregnancy, she gave birth to *a son*, just as God promised through Gabriel (Luke 1:13, lesson 1).

58. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

One family member had known that Elisabeth was pregnant (see Luke 1:36). Although Zacharias had limited capacity for communication (1:20), others among their *neighbours* and *cousins* heard of and celebrated the birth as a work of God. Only God could give a child to an elderly couple who were previously considered barren (compare Genesis 18:11–13).

Elisabeth’s experience of the Lord’s *great mercy* was a taste of the mercy that God would show toward all His people (see Luke 1:50, 54). This display of mercy led the people to rejoice *with* Elisabeth, thus fulfilling Gabriel’s promises (see 1:14). Communal celebration replaced Elisa-

beth's former feelings of disgrace (1:25).

What Do You Think?

How have you experienced joy that resulted from God's acts of mercy?

Digging Deeper

In what ways did you share these feelings of joy with other believers?

B. Affirming His Name (vv. 59–63)

59. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

Zacharias and Elisabeth desired to live in righteousness and in adherence to the Lord's commands (Luke 1:6). They would demonstrate willingness to obey God and His commands as they raised their *child*.

Circumcision of infant males *on the eighth day* after birth was a practice that dated back to the time of Abraham (see Genesis 17:9–14) and to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:3). The practice continued into the first century (see Luke 2:21; Philippians 3:5). Circumcision served as a sign that the infant son was included in the covenant with God.

Tradition is unclear regarding the cultural norms of naming a baby in the New Testament era. The Old Testament provides no explicit example of a baby boy being named at his circumcision (compare Genesis 21:1–3; 25:24–26). However, the practice of naming a son on the day of his circumcision seems to have become the norm by the time of Zacharias and Elisabeth (compare Luke 2:21). The gathered crowd was

unfamiliar with Gabriel's proclamation regarding the name of the child (see [1:13](#)). They desired to honor the priest Zacharias when *they called* his child *after* him.

What Do You Think?

How can believers determine whether or not a tradition follows God's will?

Digging Deeper

How do [Mark 7:1–15](#); [1 Corinthians 11:23](#); [Colossians 2:8](#); [2Thessalonians 2:13–15](#); and [1 Peter 1:18–19](#) inform your determination in this regard?

60. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

The crowd's consensus regarding the baby's name was immediately contradicted by the baby's *mother*. Scripture does not indicate exactly how Elisabeth knew that her child would *be called John*. Perhaps Zacharias informed her in writing (see commentary on [Luke 1:63](#), below).

61. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

The crowd did not understand Elisabeth's insistence on that *name*. John was a common name in the New Testament era (see [Matthew 10:2](#); [John 1:42](#); [Acts 4:6](#)). However, the crowd's response indicates that no other member of the baby's family (*kindred*) was named John. They were obviously not privy to the rationale behind Elisabeth's proclamation of his name.

62. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

Because Zacharias was “not able to speak” (Luke 1:20; see lesson 1), he resorted to making signs with his hands to communicate (1:22). The crowd on this day *made signs to him*, perhaps indicating that he was both mute *and* deaf (compare Mark 7:32). His impairment would continue until the fulfillment of Gabriel’s promises.

63. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

A *writing table* was a stone or board coated with wax—a smooth surface on which letters and words were etched using a writing object, like a pen (compare Isaiah 30:8). After short messages were etched on the waxy surface, the wax was heated and smoothed, creating a new surface on which a new message could be written.

As Zacharias was a priest (Luke 1:8), he was likely trained in various methods of writing. Space for a brief message was all that Zacharias required as he *wrote* on the tablet, *His name is John*. Zacharias simply reiterated the name that had been given to him by God, communicated through the angel Gabriel, and stated to the crowds by Elisabeth.

The crowd was amazed at the consistent message between Elisabeth and the impaired Zacharias. Luke’s Gospel frequently portrays people as being *marvelled* (see Luke 20:26) and in wonder (24:12) when faced with the results of God’s work (examples: 2:33; 9:43; 11:14).

II. Astonishing Restoration

(Luke 1:64–66)

A. The Speech (v. 64)

64. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

Zacharias’s inability to speak resulted from his expression of doubt regarding God’s plan ([Luke 1:20](#); see [Lesson Context](#)). However, God’s mercy is greater than human doubt. Zacharias experienced this mercy firsthand when *his mouth was opened* and *his tongue was loosed*. God’s mercy, demonstrated through His power over the physical world, is expedient and effective (see [5:24–25](#); [8:43–44](#); [13:10–13](#); [18:35–43](#)).

As Zacharias *praised God*, God’s Spirit filled him ([Luke 1:67](#); not in this week’s Scripture text). This same Spirit worked dramatically in the events and people of the early chapters of Luke’s Gospel (see [1:15](#), [35](#), [41](#), [67](#), [80](#); [2:25–27](#)).

License to Believe

When it was time for my oldest son to learn to drive, he wanted no pointers from me. I tried to warn him of certain challenges, like residential speed limits and laws regarding school zones, but he wanted none of my advice. Pridefully, he did not believe that he needed to learn anything from his parents regarding safe driving.

Unfortunately, he failed his driving test three times and had to wait six months before taking the test again. While his peers were driving, he had hit a “speed bump” and lost out on months of driving. During those months, he studied the driving rules and regulations like he was cramming for a school final exam. After this period, he took the test again and passed. No one was happier—or celebrated more—than my son!

Zacharias’s unbelief resulted in his being unable to speak—he had to wait until the birth of his son before that ability returned. When it did return, Zacharias responded with celebratory praise. Do pride and unbelief prevent you from worshipping God? Don’t hit a spiritual speed

bump! Celebrate God and His salvation. —P. L. M.

B. The Reaction (vv. 65–66)

65. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea.

Feelings of *fear* arise in a person because of an awareness of danger (see [Matthew 14:26](#); [John 7:13](#)). However, fear can also refer to the awe felt when witnessing God’s work (see [Luke 5:25–26](#); [7:15–16](#)). The people that day were in awe and fear when they saw a man who had previously been mute now be able to speak.

News of John’s birth and Zacharias’s restored ability did not stay in the temple area or even in Jerusalem. *The hill country of Judaea* was the rural region around Jerusalem. Because of its mountainous terrain, travel in this region was difficult. Despite these challenges, news of Zacharias, Elisabeth, and their baby spread *throughout* the region. People sensed that God was at work!

66. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

The miraculous nature of these events stayed with the people *that heard* or saw the events firsthand. They had a sense of wonder, awe, and anticipation *in their hearts* regarding the miraculous nature of the events (compare [Luke 2:19, 51](#)).

Though years passed before John’s ministry formally began (see [Luke 3:1–3](#)), God’s presence *was with him*. Old Testament writers described God’s presence and power as *the hand of the Lord* working for the protection and flourishing of His people ([Deuteronomy 2:15](#); [1 Chronicles 4:10](#);

Isaiah 31:3; 66:14; compare Acts 11:21).

What Do You Think?

How can you provide spiritual leadership to the children in your congregation?

Digging Deeper

To whom among younger generations will you share the good news that the Lord is with him or her?

III. Promise-Filled Song (Luke 1:76–79)

The same Spirit that filled Elisabeth (Luke 1:41) then filled Zacharias (1:67). His Spirit-filled life led him to praise God and to prophecy regarding God’s future work through John. Zacharias’s prophetic song—sometimes called the Benedictus—announced the presence of God’s “horn of salvation” (1:69) that brings promised mercy (1:72–73) and deliverance (1:74). The second part of the song (1:76–79) highlights John’s unique role within God’s plan of salvation.

A. Announcing a Prophet (vv. 76–77)

76. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.

The future tense of the statement *shalt be called* indicates that God had a specific role for this *child* that would be fulfilled according to God’s timing.

Prophets, as depicted in Scripture, gave promises and warnings regarding the future and proclaimed God’s commands for His people.

These two tasks are sometimes referred to as *foretelling* and *forthtelling*. John would become a *prophet of the Highest* in both senses. He spoke regarding God’s warnings and of the coming Messiah ([Luke 3:7–18](#)). However, he would be different from other prophets in that he would be the climax of God’s prophets (see [Matthew 11:13](#); [Luke 7:24–28](#); [16:16](#); [Hebrews 1:1–2](#)).



Visual for [Lesson 2](#). Have this visual on display as you discuss the commentary associated with [Luke 1:76–78](#).

By going *before ... the Lord*, John fulfilled a role described by the prophet Isaiah. John became “the voice ... that crieth in the wilderness”

to “*prepare ... the way of the Lord*” (Isaiah 40:3; compare Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:1–4; Luke 7:26–27). John’s prophetic work prepared the world to receive God’s glory (see Isaiah 40:4–5) and the *ways* of God’s salvation (see Matthew 3:3).

Preparing for Arrival

Before I began a new job, my new employer went to great lengths to welcome me. I received several gifts before my first day of work. On my first day, my office was arranged based on my preferences so that I could start work with ease. The company prepared a way for me to be a successful team member from the moment I arrived in the position.

John would prepare people for the arrival of the Lord (Luke 1:76). He did so by preparing people’s hearts to receive Jesus’ proclamation of salvation—a reality far greater than a new job.

Though Jesus’ first coming has passed, believers can prepare themselves and others for His second coming! The needed preparation is found in Luke 18:8: “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” Keep in mind that you can’t prepare others to have what you don’t!

—P. L. M.

77. To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.

The kind of salvation that some Jews of the first century expected was that of a political freedom and an end to oppression under foreign empires. Those Jews who were most militant in holding this desire were the Zealots. One of Jesus’ 12 apostles was called a “Zelotes” (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), likely for his identification with this group. They believed that

God's kingdom and the people's salvation would come through military and political power, sometimes requiring violence.

John would *give knowledge* of a *salvation* beyond a political one. His own *people*, the Jews, would be shown a spiritual salvation. John was not the first to proclaim God's salvation; prophets before him proclaimed similarly (see [Isaiah 25:9](#); [Jeremiah 3:23](#); etc.). The hope and mercy that God's people desired would come not from an act of human warfare but from God's redemption and salvation in Christ (see [Psalm 130:7–8](#); [Acts 4:8–12](#); [2 Timothy 3:15](#); [Hebrews 9:28](#); etc.).

The underlying Greek word for *remission* is translated elsewhere as “forgiveness” (see [Mark 3:29](#); [Acts 5:31](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [Colossians 1:14](#)). John would be “preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of *sins*” ([Luke 3:3](#)).

Zacharias's prophetic song reveals that God's plan of salvation is bigger than political salvation. People, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality, would experience salvation when they had their sins forgiven by God.

What Do You Think?

How can believers share “knowledge of salvation” in a way that would be attractive to unbelievers?

Digging Deeper

How might Paul's gospel presentations ([Acts 17:16–34](#); [22:2–21](#); [Romans 1:14–2:16](#)) inform your own approach?

B. Proclaiming God's Mercy (vv. 78–79)

78. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the

dayspring from on high hath visited us.

Zacharias had acclaimed God's promise to show mercy ([Luke 1:72](#)). That same *mercy of our God* is the foundation for God's act of salvation for His people. Its *tender* nature describes the care that comes from His compassion (see [Psalm 51:1](#); [James 5:11](#)). God does not base His giving of salvation on people's perceived worthiness. His salvation flows out of His mercy and kindness ([Isaiah 63:7](#))!

A form of the underlying Greek word translated *daypring* appears several times in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. The word is used to refer to the "Branch" of the Lord ([Jeremiah 23:5](#); [Zechariah 3:8](#); [6:12](#)). A verb form of the same word is used to speak of the rising of "the Sun of righteousness" ([Malachi 4:2](#)) and the coming of "a Star out of Jacob" ([Numbers 24:17](#)).

Because of the mention of the visitation *from Heaven on high*, we interpret that Christ is the subject of this verse and the next. Jesus is the king from "a Branch" of Jesse ([Isaiah 11:1](#)), who would shine His salvation for the world to see (see [Ephesians 5:14](#)). The resurrected and ascended Lord proclaimed later that He is "the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star" ([Revelation 22:16](#)).

79. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

When people live in opposition to God and His salvation, they live in a state of spiritual *darkness* (see [John 3:19](#); [1 Corinthians 4:5](#); [Ephesians 5:8](#); [6:12](#)). In this state, both physical and spiritual *death* are inevitable ([Romans 5:12](#); [6:23](#)).

God's salvation brings spiritual *light* into spiritual darkness. The people in spiritual darkness and in death's *shadow* will "have seen a great light" ([Isaiah 9:2](#)): the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus fulfilled this procla-

mation as He taught on the need for repentance and of the presence of the kingdom ([Matthew 4:12–17](#); compare [Acts 26:15–18](#)).

Peace means not just the absence of hostility, but God’s people living in unity, new in Him ([Ephesians 2:15](#)). The fulfillment of Zacharias’s hope came about in God’s salvation brought through Christ Jesus.

What Do You Think?

How is God’s mercy evident to both believers and unbelievers?

Digging Deeper

How do [Psalm 86:15](#); [Lamentations 3:22–23](#); [Ephesians 2:4–5](#); and [Hebrews 4:16](#) inform your answer in this regard?

Conclusion

A. Dramatic Praise

Zacharias’s so-called dramatic pause—his inability to speak—came before the high point of his depiction in Scripture. When he recovered his voice, his first act was to praise God! Though Zacharias had previously expressed doubt, God remained faithful to him and Elisabeth. The dramatic pause prepared Zacharias to give dramatic praise; God showed His goodness to the couple by giving them a son. This son would someday prepare people to receive the goodness of God’s salvation.

We all have seasons of life when we face dramatic pauses—when we may not have words to praise God or give Him our prayers. When this occurs, we may wonder if our failures have ruined us or if the presence of God has left us.

But as Zacharias discovered, God is faithful and merciful despite our unbelief. His faithfulness invites us to give Him praise. His mercy calls us

to embrace His forgiveness. With lives of praise, we can proclaim His faithfulness for the whole world to hear. When we find ourselves facing a dramatic pause, we can offer praise that proclaims God's salvation for the world. Where God's salvation is present, darkness and death will turn to light and life.

B. Prayer

God, thank You for Your display of mercy to us: the forgiveness of our sins through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Though we may not often have adequate words, we praise You. Show us how we might prepare the way in the hearts of others to receive Your forgiveness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's faithfulness will lead us to praise.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write a common male first name on an index card and a common female first name on a second index card. Do not use names of any people in your class. Give the cards to two participants, one card each.

Instruct them to look at the name on the card, think of one word that they associate with that name, and write that word on the back of the card. Participants should pass the card to the next person. Repeat this pattern until every student has written on both cards. Have a volunteer read aloud the list of words written on the back of each card. Have the students discuss what was associated with the names on the cards.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “What’s in a Name?” activity from activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.

After calling time under either activity, say, “Sometimes a name’s significance is in its meaning. Other times its significance is related to our experiences with people who have that name—no matter how fair or accurate those perceptions are. In today’s lesson, consider how the name John was significant for Elisabeth and Zacharias.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Luke 1:57–66](#). Ask two volunteers to stand at the front of the class. One volunteer will play the part of Elisabeth while the other volunteer will play the part of Zacharias. Tell the rest of the class that they will play all the neighbors and relatives.

Guide the class to act out the scene depicted in [Luke 1:57–66](#). Then ask the following questions: 1—How did God show that He was faithful to Elisabeth and her friends and family? 2—Did Zacharias’s response to his healing surprise you? 3—Did the crowd’s response to Zacharias’s healing surprise you?

Write two headers on the board: *John / Jesus*. Divide students into two groups: **John Group** and **Jesus Group**. Distribute handouts (you prepare) of the text of [Luke 1:76–79](#) to each group.

Ask each group to read the Scripture and underline which parts of the text are prophecies about John and which parts are prophecies about Jesus. After five minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to come to the board and write, under the appropriate header, the lines of Scripture that their group underlined.

Ask, “How did John and Jesus each fulfill these prophecies?” Allow students time to respond and discuss. (Note: You may need to prepare other Scripture passages in advance to reference the ways that they each fulfilled their prophecies.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Prophecies” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

After calling time, ask how Zacharias’s prophecy showed God’s faithfulness and prepared the hearts of the people to receive the Lord.

Into Life

Distribute an index card and pen to each student. Ask students to write down how they would prepare for a visit by an important guest. After one minute, have students share what they wrote with a partner.

Ask, “John prepared the way for the Lord. How did he do this?” Have students work in their pairs to write down some ways John prepared the way for Jesus. After five minutes, have a volunteer read [John 1:19–39](#) aloud. Give students the opportunity to compare this text to what they wrote.

Have students work in their pairs to identify one way that they can prepare someone’s heart to receive the Lord and become His disciple. Have each pair share their findings for the whole class.

End class by having each pair pray for courage and opportunities to prepare people to become disciples of Jesus.