

GOSPEL

The Good News Of Christmas is That God is Always Working!

December 3, 2017

Luke 1:1-25; 57-80

Dedication to Theophilus

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,[a] of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in

the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” 21 And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. 23 And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, 25 “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

The Birth of John the Baptist

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” 61 And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. 64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 65 And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Zechariah's Prophecy

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

68 “Blessed be 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 from of old,
71 that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us[h] from on high
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the
day of his public appearance to Israel.

COMMENTARY

§8. The Annunciation of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5–22)

Purpose

This section’s purpose is to introduce the promised forerunner or messenger to the Messiah, and to establish that he was part of God’s preordained plan.

A. John’s Parents (Luke 1:5–7)

Exegesis

v 5 daughters = (lit.) female descendants.

v 6 before = (lit.) in the judgment of.

walking = conducting their lives.

ordinances = statutes (see Deut 4:1—these are the regulations which God gave in addition to His laws).

blameless = (or) faultless.

v 7 well-advanced in years = i.e., were elderly.

Exposition

The names of John’s parents show how carefully God had organized for the arrival of His Son on earth, for in Hebrew ‘Zacharias’ means ‘God remembers,’ and ‘Elizabeth’ means ‘the oath of God.’ Together, the parents’ names spell out ‘God remembers His oath.’ God had been at

work many years previously (v. 7), leading the parents of these two venerable people to name their children to announce His purpose! The names of Zacharias and Elizabeth together point back to the first promise God gave the first man and woman immediately after the first sin (Gen 3:15); indeed, the oath is addressed to Satan, the promise is for man. We are being introduced to the climax of the spiritual battle between Satan and God. This single touch makes it evident how much importance God attached to Jesus' coming, for even His forerunner's birth was carefully planned. The fact that this marriage was of long standing and yet childless also played a part in God's purposes, for Elizabeth's conception was a sure sign that something remarkable had happened (vv. 36–58). Then, when miraculous events took place at John's circumcision more people recognized God's hand in this birth (v. 66).

Our normal sense of values would regard the childlessness of this godly couple as a tragedy, yet God was preparing them to be the parents of the greatest human child ever born (Luke 7:28). This sobering truth does much to remind us of the shortsightedness of our judgment when compared to the perfect judgment of our limitless God. This remarkable couple, whom God Himself called righteous (1:6), were childless for many years, yet had the ultimate blessing of being included in God's preparation for the advent of His Son!

B. Gabriel Appears to Zacharias (Luke 1:8–22)

Exegesis

v 8 order = subdivision (of the priestly course).

v 9 his lot = (lit.) he was selected by lot.

burn incense = this was a daily ritual (Exod 30:7).

temple = this Greek word denotes the heart of a temple, the seat of worship—the Holy Place and Holy of Holies (see Exod 26:33), not the congregational assembly area. The altar of incense was in the Holy Place, immediately before the Holy of Holies—which represented God's dwelling place (Exod 30:1–9). Only ordained priests properly attired in priestly robes entered the Holy Place (Exod 28:40–43).

v 10 outside = i.e., outside the Holy Place.

v 11 appeared = (or) became visible.

right side = Jewish angelology regarded the left side of the altar as the place for angels; only God used the right side. So tradition suggested to Zacharias that he was seeing God; now, as no man can see God and live, he was terrified! (Shepherd, 21).

v 12 troubled = agitated, unsettled.

fell upon = took possession of.

v 13 prayer = supplication, petition, request.

is heard = is acceded to.

v 14 gladness = exultation (this word is used frequently in the Greek translation of the Psalms in connection with the Messiah).

at his birth = (or) over his birth (this is not temporal).

v 15 sight of the Lord = (lit.) presence of (before) the Lord.

neither wine nor strong drink = the prohibition is specifically emphatic in Greek; i.e., absolutely not drink wine, etc.

v 16 turn = in a religious, moral sense (or turn back).

v 17 to the children = (lit.) towards children (see Mal 4:5–6—for God is promising to restore family love through the forerunner).

wisdom = (lit.) way of thinking (or frame of mind).

v 18 How = (lit.) Whereby, According to what.

v 19 answered = (lit.) continued speaking.

v 20 in their season = in their natural course (time).

v 21 waited = (lit.) were expecting (i.e., he was clearly overdue).

that he tarried in the temple = at his delay in the Holy Place.

v 22 beckoned = customarily, the priest pronounced a benediction over the congregation from the temple steps.

Exposition

The hand of God is to be seen in v. 9, for He arranged that Zacharias' lot fall on the day on which He wished to communicate with him. In David's time the priesthood had become so numerous that he reorganized them into twenty-four courses (1 Chronicles 24), each of which served a two-week stint per year. Only three or four of these courses returned from the Babylonian captivity, but the original arrangement was preserved by appointing new courses (Ezra 3:11; 6:18). Fifty or more priests officiated each day around Jesus' time and by a process of four drawings of lots they were allocated various functions for the day. The highest honor of all was to be awarded the distinction of offering the incense which symbolized Israel's accepted prayers. This honor was regarded as so high that a priest was only granted this privilege once in his lifetime (and even on that basis a goodly proportion of the priesthood never received the honor). This, then, is the remarkable coincidence referred to: when God wanted to communicate

with Zacharias, a chance that came less than once in a priest's lifetime placed him in front of the altar of incense! This was the wonderful timing of Zacharias' selection to burn incense.

The section of Herod's temple in which the narrative of Zacharias is set consisted of the following areas:

- i) The Holy of Holies was intended to hold the ark of the covenant and its mercy seat. As the ark had not been returned from the Babylonian captivity, this room was empty in Zacharias' time.
- ii) The Holy Place was separated from the Holy of Holies by a curtain and contained three items of furniture: the altar of incense in the center immediately in front of the Holy of Holies, further back on the right (looking from the Holy of Holies) the golden candlestick, and on the left the table of showbread (Exodus 25; 30:1–9).
- iii) The porch from which Zacharias would pronounce the benediction over the male Israelite worshipers gathered in the Court of Israel (the laver and the altar of burnt offering were in this courtyard).

Zacharias' fear at seeing the angel was more than just fear of the supernatural, it was fear of divine judgment and death. Jewish angelology considered the left side as the place for an angel, only God used the right side. So these traditions suggested to Zacharias that he was seeing God. Now, as no man can see God and live (Exod 33:20), he was terrified! Gabriel is only named four times in Scripture (Dan 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26), and each time speaks of the coming of our Lord. He is an angel who stands in the presence of God (v. 19), one who brings instruction directly from God. The news Gabriel brought to Zacharias must be studied carefully, for it revealed that John was to come 'in the spirit and power' of Elijah (v. 17; i.e., he was not Elijah reincarnate), and that his function would be to prepare Israel for its Messiah. This explains the disclaimer which John made in John 1:21; he was not Elijah, he came in the spirit and power of Elijah (note, too, that John exercised Elijah's power differently, for no miracles are attributed to him in Scripture).

John was to be a Nazarite (v. 15 with Numbers 6), and, most rare, to be a lifelong Nazarite. Scripture reports only two other men with this distinction, Samson and Samuel, and both were chosen to contribute towards the salvation of Israel. Note, one of the consequences of a people turning to God is the restoration of family relationships (v. 17) and the subjection of those who obstinately reject the will of God (disobedient ones) to the rule of righteous reason. Many wonderful things were happening to Zacharias, yet he disbelieved Gabriel (v. 20). Verse 18 could be paraphrased, 'Prove it'; that is why Zacharias was punished by being struck dumb—he was reluctant to believe God's word.

The offering of incense was marked with ritual signals to measure its progress, so the public would be well aware that something unusual was happening in the Holy Place. The Jews had a

deep dread of entering God's presence, for they feared that to do so unworthily could result in being struck dead (Lev 10:1–3). So we can surmise that some in the crowd were apprehensive at Zacharias' delay, fearing that he had been struck dead and that at any moment fire would flash from the Holy Place and consume them (Num 16:21), or that the earth would open and swallow them as it had Korah and his supporters (Num 16:32). We can their relief when eventually Zacharias emerged and better imagine their astonishment when they realized he had seen a vision when we remember that Israel had been without prophetic revelation for four centuries prior to this event. God had again, at last, communicated with His people in His temple! Surely, they should have realized that marvelous days lay ahead! Maybe, their interest survived for three decades until John began his ministry, for this could explain, in part, his ministry's rapid success.

§9. John Conceived (Luke 1:23–25)

Exegesis

v 23 service = (lit.) liturgy.

Purpose

The purpose of these three verses is to establish that John's birth, whilst miraculous, was not supernatural like that of Jesus.

Exposition

The Jews regarded childlessness as a sign of divine displeasure, and therefore as a reproach. Instructive, is it not! How often we think God must be displeased with us because things are not going the way we want, yet in reality He has more magnificent things in store for us! Elizabeth thought she was under reproach (v. 25), but God declared her blameless (v. 6) and had a unique blessing and privilege in store for her!

The miraculous nature of this conception becomes more vivid when one knows that the Jews of Zacharias' day customarily reserved the term 'old man' for those over sixty years; so v. 18 makes us realize just how old Zacharias and Elizabeth were. They could have been great-grandparents when they became parents for the first time! Consider, too, that the old man Zacharias did not have to comply with the prophecy. Imagine Elizabeth's surprise when she, like her ancestress, Sarah, found herself pregnant when she was past childbearing; some weeks would have passed before she hid herself in a mixture of embarrassment, wonder and joy. The five months Elizabeth hid herself (v. 24) probably covered the entire period of her visible pregnancy, so it seems likely she went into seclusion from the time she knew she was pregnant (remember her age; it would have taken her longer than usual to realize she was pregnant). It is significant that God chose a righteous couple to be the parents of His messenger (v. 6). God reserves this sort of honor for people who are close to Him and who will actively pursue His will. Elizabeth thought God was taking away her reproach (v. 25); indeed, He was showering her with honor!

John's conception so late in his mother's marriage and life is remarkably parallel to Isaac's,

for, firstly, Sarah was well past childbearing and had long been married to Abraham before she miraculously conceived. Secondly, the hill country centers on Hebron where Sarah received news of her supernatural conception two millennia previously! Spiritually sensitive Jews, pondering Elizabeth's miracle, would quickly note she was resident in the same area as her illustrious forebear when she, too, received news of bearing a baby beyond the time of women. The similarities would surely have impressed on them that John must be as exceptional and special as Isaac. They must have wondered just what great things God had in store for Israel for Him to be rerunning this special scenario! We do well to recognize these similarities, for then we begin to understand the perfection of God's plan and the impact of John's birth on the people in the hill country of Judea.¹

1:1–4

The Literary Prologue

In Luke's day the more sophisticated writers would often introduce their books with a piece of stylish prose written in the classical style. (Those with literary pretensions generally imitated the Greek of a much earlier period than was commonly spoken.) Luke's introduction here is superb in this regard.

1:1. Luke's word here for "account" was used for a narrative of many events, as distinct from a narrative of a single event, and was most characteristically (though certainly not only) applied to works of history.

Writers compiling a work usually started with one main source and wove in secondary material from another source or sources. (Most scholars agree that Luke begins with Mark as his main source and weaves in other material, including "Q"). Writers also normally explained why they were writing a work if other books on the same subject had appeared. Some writers invoked length (see 2 Maccabees) or stylistic considerations (see Theon) to explain the need for a new work; other authors thought earlier writers had investigated matters inadequately (Josephus, Artemidorus) or had embellished them rhetorically (Tacitus); still others simply wished to compile earlier works more thoroughly (Quintilian).

1:2. "Handed down" was sometimes a technical term in the ancient world. Disciples of rabbis normally passed down first-generation traditions carefully. Oral storytellers were also adept at memorizing and passing on stories accurately. Because Luke writes while eyewitnesses are still alive, and because they were accorded a place of prominence in the early church, we may be sure that his traditions are reliable. (Eyewitness sources were accepted as the best.)

1:3–4. Literary introductions often specified the purpose of the work (e.g., in Josephus's *Against*

¹ Mills, M. S. (1999). *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record* (Lk 1:5–25). Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries.

Apion: “to teach all who wish to know the truth” about the Jewish people); here Luke wishes to provide “exact information” (“exact truth”—NASB; “certainty”—NIV).

It was proper for a good historian to check the data that had come to him. Books would often open with a dedication to the wealthy patron who sponsored the writing project. (Luke-Acts is not just a private work; Luke’s Gospel is within 3 percent of the length of Acts, both fitting the standard size of scroll for publication.)

Theophilus, the name of the sponsor, was a common Jewish name. “Most excellent” could literally mark him as a member of a high class in Roman society (the equestrian order), although Luke may use the title only as a courtesy. Theophilus’s desire for verification was reasonable in view of the many competing claims to religious truth in the Roman Empire.

1:5–25

The Angel and the Priest

After the much more classical Greek prologue of 1:1–4, here Luke establishes himself as a master of various literary styles by adapting to Septuagint style, reflecting its Hebraic rhythms, which dominate chapters 1–2.

1:5. Historians customarily introduced a narrative by listing the names of reigning kings or governors, which provided the approximate time of the narrative. Herod the Great was officially king of Judea from 37 to 4 B.C. Twenty-four “orders” (NRSV, TEV) or “divisions” (NIV, NASB) of priests (1 Chron 24:7–18, especially v. 10) took turns serving in the temple, two nonconsecutive weeks a year. Priests could marry any pure Israelite, but they often preferred daughters of priests (“daughters of Aaron”).

1:6. The terms Luke uses to describe Zechariah and Elizabeth are the same that the Old Testament used for some other righteous people, such as Noah (Gen 6:9), Abraham (Gen 17:1) and Job (Job 1:1). One who reads those narratives understands that although they may not have been morally perfect (Gen 9:21) or complete (Job 42:3–6), they did not violate any stated commandments in the law. Thus Luke uses these terms to challenge the misconception that could arise from conventional wisdom concerning barrenness (Lk 1:7).

1:7. To be childless was economically and socially disastrous: economically, because parents had no one to support them in old age (cf. comment on 1 Tim 5:4, 8); socially, because in the law barrenness was sometimes a judgment for sin, and many people assumed the worst possible cause of a problem. Most people assumed that barrenness was a defect of the wife, and Jewish teachers generally insisted that a man divorce a childless wife so he could procreate. “Aged” may suggest that they were over sixty (Mishnah *Abot* 5:21); age itself conferred some social status and was sometimes listed among qualifications or virtues.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, Zechariah and Elizabeth are clearly righteous (1:6; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 4:1), and the Jewish reader would immediately think of righteous

Abraham and Sarah, who was also barren. The Lord also opened the wombs of other matriarchs, Rachel and Rebekah, and those of Hannah and Samson's mother; yet Elizabeth is especially like Sarah, who was not only infertile but also too old to bear.

1:8–9. There were many more priests and Levites than necessary (perhaps eighteen thousand) for any given function in the temple, so they were chosen for specific tasks by lot, during their appointed time of service (besides service on the three major festivals, they served about two weeks out of the year). Given the number of priests, a priest might get the opportunity in 1:9 only once in a lifetime; this would have been a special occasion for Zechariah.

Incense offerings (Ex 30:7–8) had been standard in ancient Near Eastern temples, perhaps to quench the stench of burning flesh from the sacrifices in the closed buildings. This offering in the temple preceded the morning sacrifice and followed the evening sacrifice. It is said that the officer who ministered regularly in the temple signaled the time to begin the offering and then withdrew; the priest cast incense on this altar, prostrated himself and then withdrew himself—normally immediately (cf. 1:21).

1:10. The hours of morning and evening sacrifices were also the major public hours of prayer in the temple (cf. Acts 3:1). Except during a feast, most of the people praying there would be Jerusalemites; unable to enter the priestly sanctuary, they were presumably men in the Court of Israel, and some women outside that in the Court of the Women.

1:11. The altar of incense was in the center of the priestly sanctuary, outside the holy of holies.

Zechariah 3:1 reports an Old Testament apparition in the temple. There Satan appears to the high priest, standing at his right to accuse him; but the high priest stands before the angel of the Lord, who defends him and brings him a message of peace for his people.

1:12. People usually reacted with fear to angelic revelations in the Old Testament as well.

1:13. Angelic annunciations, often complete with names, also preceded some major births in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen 16:11; 17:19; Is 7:14). Childless people throughout the ancient world entreated deities for children.

1:14–15. The closest Old Testament parallel to Luke 1:15 is Judges 13:4–5, 7, where Samson, as a Nazirite from birth, is warned to abstain from strong drink (cf. Num 6:3–4). Cf. Luke 7:33. Ancient Judaism especially viewed the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy.

1:16–17. Elijah was to return before the day of the Lord, turning the father's hearts to the children (Mal 4:5–6; cf. Eccles 48:10). Although later rabbis interpreted this event as Elijah, master of intricate legal questions, straightening out Israelite genealogies, the point in Malachi is probably familial reconciliation; cf. Micah 7:5–6. On "prepared for the Lord," see Luke 3:4. On coming in Elijah's measure of the Spirit, cf. Elisha's request for a "double portion" (the inheritance right of a firstborn son) of this in 2 Kings 2:9; although John claimed no miracles, he was a great prophet—for he was Jesus' forerunner.

1:18. Like Zechariah here, Abraham (Gen 15:8; cf. 17:17), Gideon (Judg 6:17, 36–40; 7:10–11) and others in the Old Testament (2 Kings 20:8; cf. Is 7:10–14) asked for signs in the face of astounding promises, but they were not punished. That Zechariah’s sign should be harsher to him (1:20) suggests only that this revelation is much greater than those which preceded it.

1:19. Although Judaism had developed quite a list of angelic names, the New Testament mentions only the two who also appear in the Old Testament: Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21) and Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1). These became the two most popular angels in contemporary Jewish lore, in which Gabriel was sent on many divine missions. Jewish literature typically portrayed the chief angels as before God’s throne.

1:20–21. Casting incense on the heated altar of incense normally took little time, after which the priest emerged immediately. The delay here may have troubled the crowds; perhaps they thought Zechariah had been disrespectful and struck dead, or that something else had gone wrong. If Zechariah’s offering had failed, their prayers were also in jeopardy.

1:22. The term here for “mute” can, but need not, include deafness.

1:23. Because his term of service was only two weeks a year, and he had no son to support him in his old age, Zechariah probably worked a small farm or did other work in the hill country of Judah. (Priests were supposed to be supported by others’ tithes, not by working the land, but high taxes on the poor and unfair practices by the priestly aristocracy—especially in the decades just prior to A.D. 66—combined to make it harder on less wealthy priests.)

1:24–25. Praise such as Elizabeth utters here was common among the barren whom God visited (Gen 21:6–7; 1 Sam 2:1–11) but especially recalls Rachel’s exultation, “God has removed my reproach!” (Gen 30:23).²

1:57–66

The Birth of John

This account lacks the hagiographic details found in many Jewish birth stories of the period, especially those about Noah and Moses, where the baby illumined the room or (newborn Noah) spoke.

1:57–58. Neighbors customarily joined in celebrations (cf. 15:6), and the birth—especially an unusual one like this one—and circumcision of a son in the family home (typically performed by the father in this period) were such occasions; Jewish tradition suggests that guests assembled every night from a boy’s birth to his circumcision. On the special cause for the celebration here,

² Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Lk 1:1–25). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

see comment on 1:7. Jewish people viewed sons as essential because they carried on the family line, although in practice they seem to have loved daughters no less.

1:59. The law required that circumcisions be performed on the eighth day; this was a special event, and Jewish custom included a charge to raise the child according to biblical law. Jewish children had customarily been named at birth; the evidence for naming a child at circumcision is late, apart from this text. But Roman infants were named eight or nine days after birth (for girls and boys, respectively), and Luke may either accommodate Greco-Roman practice for his readers or, more likely, indicate the Greco-Roman influence on Palestinian Jewish custom. Zechariah's muteness may have delayed the normal naming, but cf. 2:21.

1:60–62. Children were often named for grandfathers and sometimes for fathers. The father rather than the mother had ultimate say in the matter; in Roman (as opposed to Jewish) society, the father even had the legal right to decide whether the family would raise the child or throw the infant out on the trash heaps.

1:63. The writing tablet was a wooden board coated with wax; one would inscribe the message on the wax surface.

1:64–66. Prophetic speechlessness and the restoration of speech once the prophecy had been fulfilled are found also in Ezekiel 33:22.

1:67–79

Zechariah's Prophecy

In the Old Testament only a fine line existed between inspired praise and prophecy (e.g., 1 Sam 10:5–6; 1 Chron 25:1–3), and often, as in Psalms, one could move from one to the other (46:1, 10; 91:1, 14).

1:67. The Spirit of God was especially (though not exclusively) associated with prophecy in the Old Testament, and this perspective continued in various Jewish circles around the time of Jesus.

1:68. "Blessed be God" occurs in Old Testament praise (e.g., Ps 41:13; 72:18; 1 Chron 16:36; 2 Chron 6:4) and became a standard opening prayer for Jewish blessings. The prophets and later writers (cf. the Dead Sea Scrolls) spoke of God visiting his people for redemption and judgment. The use of "redeem" here compares this new event to when God saved his people from Egypt; the prophets had promised future deliverance in a new exodus.

1:69. Because a horn could give an animal the victory in battle, it indicated strength. "Horn of salvation" parallels the meaning of "rock" and "strength" in Psalm 18:2. Thus the Davidic Messiah would be their deliverer (cf. Ps 132:17).

1:70–75. God had promised salvation from their enemies in his covenant with Abraham and his

descendants. The language here thoroughly reflects the Old Testament.

1:76. “Prepare his way” alludes to Isaiah 40:3 (predicting the herald of a new exodus) and perhaps Malachi 3:1 (probably connected with Elijah in 4:5); cf. Luke 3:4.

1:77. Future “salvation” in Isaiah includes deliverance from political oppressors; but, as here, it is predicated upon Israel’s restoration to divine favor through forgiveness.

1:78. “Sunrise” (NASB) or “rising sun” (NIV) could allude to God as the Sun of righteousness in Malachi 4:2 (cf. Ps 84:11). Some commentators have suggested a Greek play on words referring to the Messiah as both a “shoot” and a “star” in the Old Testament.

1:79. Although Mary weaves in various allusions here as elsewhere in the chapter, Isaiah 9:2 is especially in view; the context of this passage is explicitly messianic (Is 9:6–7).

1:80. The summary statement is especially reminiscent of 1 Samuel 2:26 and 3:19 for the maturation of the prophet Samuel. The desert was the expected place for a new exodus and thus for the Messiah; some groups, seeking greater purity, withdrew from common Judaism into the desert. Whether John may have studied among such groups for a time is debated, although it is probable if his aged parents died before he reached maturity (the Essenes reportedly adopted children and trained them from age ten on).³

³ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Lk 1:57–80). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.