

Weekly Bible Study for Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

Advent #1 Hope Luke 1 67-80 by Jean Davies w/c Sunday 29th November 2020

“Well, who would have believed it?” How often have we heard this said? And it might well have been said about the elderly priest, Zechariah, when his neighbours and relatives heard him suddenly burst into song.

Pray and read Luke Chapter 1 as background; and re-read Luke 1:67-80 for our study.

Earlier in the chapter, we read that Zechariah is temporarily struck dumb by the angel Gabriel.

Ironically, Gabriel’s appearance to Zechariah is at the altar of incense (1:11), the burning of incense being symbolic of prayer rising to God. Zechariah had long hoped and prayed for a son; Gabriel was bringing the good news that God had heard and granted his prayer and had appointed this son, to be named John, into a privileged position; but Zechariah had wanted proof, thus refusing to believe.

Now, following the birth of his son, he confirms in writing his name as “John”. Immediately, Zechariah’s speech is restored and he is filled with the Holy Spirit to speak out in his joy a hope-filled hymn in **praise** of God, of **prophecy** over John’s role as forerunner of Israel’s long-hoped-for Messiah, and of **proclamation** that the arrival of Messiah was indeed imminent.

Q1 – God does not “pension off” His people when we reach a certain age, but He is always training us for service. What things do you think Zechariah would have learned about himself and God during his “silent time”? What is God teaching you in your “quiet times” with Him?

In Praise of God – (vv68-75) Zechariah’s hymn is called Benedictus (“Praise be”) in Latin. Through many centuries, God had spoken through his prophets such as Malachi, Haggai, Job, Zechariah, and David regarding the Messiah’s coming; but Isaiah is often regarded as the greatest Old Testament prophet, the prophet of redemption and salvation. Zechariah extols God’s promises as fulfilled.

Q2 – What hymn of praise to God do you find yourself singing out, and why? How do you/how can you express your praise of God apart from singing?

Prophecy over John – (vv76, 77) Zechariah turns his address towards his eight-day old baby boy “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High”. Both Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 3:1 foretell the coming of John and his God-given role as the one who would prepare the way of the Lord. Can you picture it? This elderly man speaks so reverently to his tiny baby son. Zechariah has no doubt in his mind now as the Holy Spirit enables him to speak prophetic words beyond himself.

Q3 – Zechariah had waited in hope for his family (a son) and for his people (salvation). What is your hope for your family, your church and our country (our people) as we wait out these dark days of winter, the Covid pandemic and Brexit. What hope has God turned into reality for you?

Proclamation of Messiah – (vv78, 79) – Zechariah states that the Messiah will come from heaven bringing in Himself God’s light to shine into spiritual darkness, dispel the fear of death, and to lead us into peace. Why? Because of the “tender mercy of our God”. **Take a few moments to ponder the “tender mercy of God”. How does the phrase impact on you?**

It was by the Holy Spirit that Zechariah spoke out this “Praise Be” hymn. Verse 80 tells us how John, filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, grew and lived in the desert until his public appearance to Israel. His parents, elderly at his birth, may have died when John was quite young. John became known as John the Baptist, and was confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, as “...and more than a prophet” (Matt 11:9) and as the one spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. John was God’s prophet of repentance and hope.