

Week 1 Song of Zechariah - Benedictus

The song of Zechariah can be found in Luke 1, vv 67 – 80, but useful background reading occurs earlier in the chapter in verses 5 – 25, 39 – 45 and 57 – 66. It is much more than a song; it is a Spirit-filled prophecy!

The song falls naturally into two parts. The first part (verses 68 – 75) consists of praise for God's dealings with his people, while the second (verses 76 – 79) is prophecy addressed directly to the newly-born John.

There are echoes here of the story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 21, when God made good his promise of a child even though Sarah was past the natural age for childbearing, or Rachel bearing two sons after her disappointment at failing to conceive (Gen 30:22-25), and there are similar stories about the mothers of Samson and Samuel.

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were not expecting the blessing of a child at this point in their lives, although they must have prayed daily for this to happen throughout their marriage. They seem quite an ordinary couple, devout, he one of many priests serving in the Temple, but obviously not given to a blank acceptance of the miraculous. Zechariah demands a sign from the angel bringing news of the promised child (who will be known as John the Baptist), and gets more than he expected in being rendered speechless until the birth (Luke 1: 20).

This might seem a little strange unless you put in the context of a nation for whom prophecy seemed to have gone silent for several hundred years. Perhaps Zechariah's temporary affliction mirrors in some way the nation's current dilemma, and with the first cry of John would herald a new flowering of prophesy, beginning with this song. A sign that God was about to do something new.



Some questions to think about

- 1 - Is God's Word being heard clearly today, through Church leaders and the media, and if not, how can Christians do their bit to help?
- 2 - Zechariah's song takes us back to the very earliest days of God's dealings with humankind, and the covenant promise to Abraham. How important to you are the Old Testament stories, and your own Christian heritage?
- 3 - Here is a father who is very clear as to the future that awaits his child. For those who have children, can you remember what your own hopes were for the baby you held in your hands?
- 4 - When you were growing up, what were the influences that led you in the direction that you finally went, in your studies or career?
- 5 - Look again at Zechariah's words. Are there any that speak particularly to you?
- 6 - Do you get discouraged in your prayer life when repeated petitions to God do not seem to be answered, or at least not in the way that you envisaged? How important are persistence and patience?
- 7 - Is there an Advent message for the Church today in Zechariah's song?
- 8 - The final words of the song talk of the 'path of peace'. What would be your prayer for the world during Advent?