

A vertical rectangular image showing a night sky over sand dunes. The sky is dark with a dense field of stars. The Milky Way galaxy is visible as a bright, hazy band of light stretching diagonally across the upper half of the frame. The sand dunes in the foreground are dark and silhouetted against the bright sky.

Anticipation

A four part series leading up to
Christmas
Celebrating the season of
Advent.
Part Four



Christmas Day is almost here and as well as the smell of delicious food in the air, there is also the scent of love as gifts of perfume nestle under the tree, and jewellery glints temptingly to couples passing by shop windows. Christmas does shine with love, but its sparkle doesn't come from gems it comes from infinite loyalty.

In this last part of our series “anticipation,” the story moves on to the birth of John and Zechariah’s subsequent song of praise and thanksgiving, known as the Benedictus.

357 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbours 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 neighbours. 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.

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 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.*

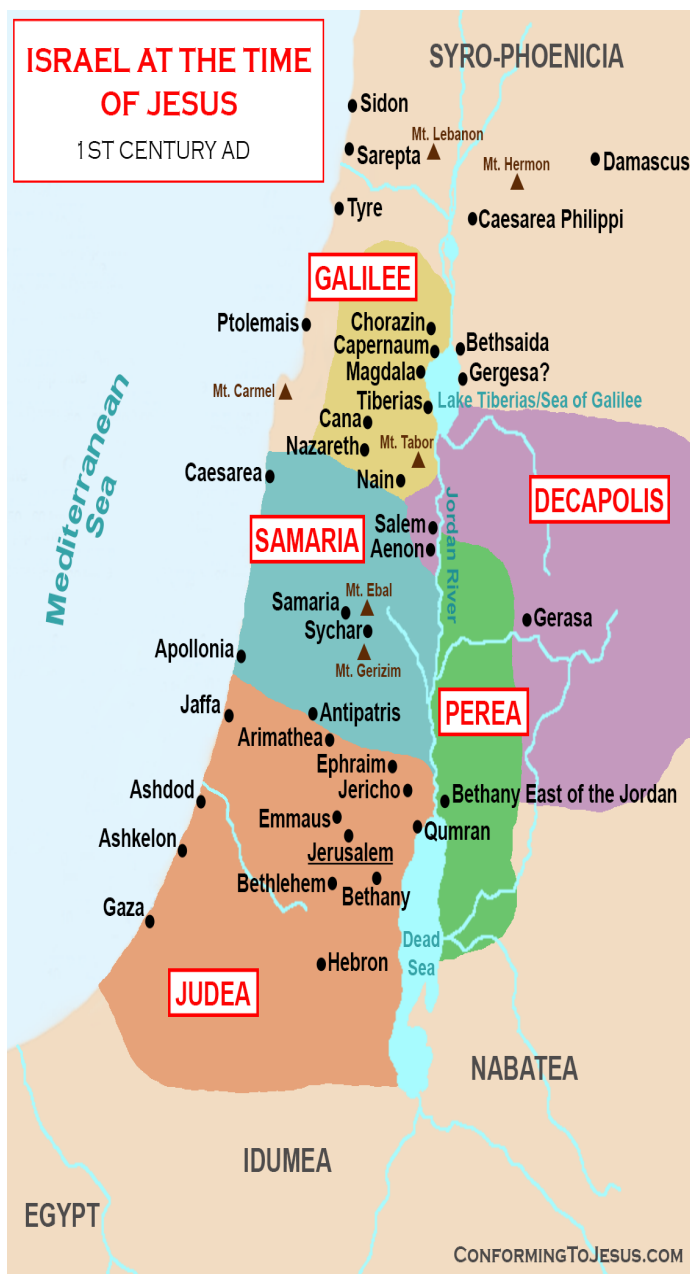
Luke 1:57–80 (ESV)

Commentary

The time of anticipation for Zechariah and Elizabeth reaches its climax and John is born. the family, friends, and neighbours assume the boy is to be name after his father but Elizabeth steps in and emphatically says he is to be named John. The group, seemingly unwilling to accept the authority of Elizabeth's word turn to Zechariah, who being deaf as well as unable to speak is oblivious to the conversation. However through signs and gesticulations they get the message across and Zechariah calling for a writing tablet (a piece of wood

ISRAEL AT THE TIME OF JESUS

1ST CENTURY AD



covered in wax) writes firmly his name is John! At which point Zechariah is again able to hear and speak to the amazement of all who were gathered, and the news quickly spread around the region and became the subject of much speculation as to what this birth and child was all about.

Zechariah, meanwhile is filled with the Spirit and He “prophecies” with thanksgiving and praise at what God has done and what it means for God’s people now and in the future. The birth of John is held in the context of what God has done in the past and what He will do in the future, and John’s role in it. God has visited His people in the past (Exodus is particularly in view) and He has visited them in the present raising up a saviour in the house of David. God had promised this to Abraham and to the fore fathers, as well as reminding His people of the promise through the prophets, and now He is delivering on His promise.

The purpose of the Exodus was so that the people could worship and serve God without fear, and that same purpose remains true now. The way in which God’s people serve Him is in holiness and righteousness.

The role of John will be to get the people ready for the coming saviour, calling them back to repentance, making know the way God will save. Jesus, the light of the world is coming, to remove the darkness and shadow of death, and John is to prepared for His arrival.

The passage ends with a brief description of John’s growth and comment on his location in anticipation of his ministry.

Group Study

As this is Christmas week, and we anticipate that you will be spending time with family and friends there is no group study.

Personal study

Over the Christmas season find some time to read some of the promises God made which are realised in the birth of Jesus Christ, and the infinite loyalty He has shown His people, despite our lack of loyalty to Him, and thank and praise Him for it.

Jesus is the one who God promised would crush Satan's head.

*15 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."*

Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

Blessed be the Lord God because:

Jesus is the offspring promised to Abraham

14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.
Genesis 13:14–16 (ESV)

Blessed be the Lord God because:

Jesus is the promise of Judah

8 *"Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons shall bow down before you.*

9 *Judah is a lion's cub;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.*

*He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?*

10 *The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*

11 *Binding his foal to the vine
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
he has washed his garments in wine
and his vesture in the blood of grapes.*

12 *His eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth whiter than milk.*

Genesis 49:8–12 (ESV)

Blessed be the Lord God because:

Jesus is the promise made to David

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’ ”
17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

2 Samuel 7:12–17 (ESV)

Blessed be the Lord God because:

Jesus is the promise made through Isaiah
Isaiah 9:2–7 (ESV)

2 *The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.*

3 *You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*

4 *For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

5 *For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

6 *For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

7 *Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it*

*with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.*

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)

Blessed be the Lord God because:

KIDS CORNER

Luke 1:57-80

1. What is love?



These days, it can be hard to decipher what love really means. “Love” can express how we feel toward those close to us, but it can also describe our opinion of ice cream and TV shows. Fortunately, God sends people to tell us what love really is. When John the Baptist was born, his parents recognized that he was one of those people. Jesus was coming, and for John, nothing was more important than explaining the real love which Jesus would bring. This is God’s love, and it means kindness, selflessness, patience, and forgiveness. He wants what’s best for us, no matter who we are or what we’ve done. This is the whole reason we have Christmas! God loved us so much, He sent Jesus to free

us from the evil in our hearts and rescue us from its punishment. It's the best Christmas gift ever! And guess what? It's available to you!

2. Have you accepted God's loving gift of salvation?

