

**Luke 1:57-80**  
**June 24, 2018**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: When you brought children into the world, how did you decide on the name for your children? Who did you consult for potential names? [Let people engage]

Q: How important was it to continue a family name as you named your child? Or was it? [Let people engage]

On my mother's side of the family, the name Eugene was given to the firstborn sons of each generation. My grandfather was Eugene Hunter Canfield. My mother had a half-brother named Eugene Canfield. And then when my mother got married, my brother was named Eugene Canfield Jones to maintain the name in our generation. I have noticed that when daughters have come along, the maiden last name often becomes a middle name. Why? It represents a certain lineage or family line. We like an audit trail of "who came from who!"

**Transition:** But that's an understatement when it comes to the Jewish community. Naming a child, especially a firstborn son, was a big deal. The naming of your son would occur on the 8<sup>th</sup> day from birth, which is when baby boys were circumcised. The Jews looked on children as a gift from God and a "heritage from the Lord." Traditionally, a baby boy would be named after his father or someone else in the family. Circumcision was the covenant mark. Share how Jewish families came up with a name for their sons, i.e. the name was to identify the family lineage and was often the proof that they came from the line of Abraham, AND it reflected WHAT they were going to accomplish! And the name was given on the 8<sup>th</sup> day.

However, Naming Zechariah and Elizabeth's son was different as you already know from a prior lesson. It certainly maintained the goal of defining WHAT his role in life would be, but WHO got to name the child was not the normal group of people that would show up on the 8<sup>th</sup> day for the circumcision rite!

All of us CAN succeed as ambassadors to Christ BY relying on the Holy Spirit to help us articulate the message of salvation to our circles of influence. But it's also important that we pick up some key **ELEMENTS** of the salvation message that we'll see in today's passage. Let's begin.

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.57:

- When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

V.58:

- Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

V.59:

- On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,

V.60:

- but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” (The word “John” signifies “the grace of Jehovah.”)

V.61:

- They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”

V.62:

- Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.

V.63:

- He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.”

V.64:

- Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.

V.65:

- The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.

V.66:

- Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.57-58: After Elizabeth gives birth to a son, the neighbors and relatives hear that the Lord has shown her “great mercy.” What do you think they meant by that? [Elizabeth was old and by God’s grace, He brought her and the baby safely through delivery. AND I bet it could also mean at the big picture level that God allowed her to have a baby in the first place.]

Q V.59: Remember that the relatives and neighbors are attending the circumcision event. So naming this child was like a “group activity.” They wanted to follow tradition, so what did they want to name him? [Zechariah “junior” or something that clearly identified the child as the son of Zechariah.]

Q V.60: But what did Elizabeth say? [“No” with emphasis! He is to be named John.]

Q V.61: How did those in attendance respond? [“There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”]

Q V.62-64: They turn to Zechariah to get his input on a name, and what happens? [He writes on a tablet and confirms the name “John” and the Spirit restored his ability to speak, which allowed Zechariah to start praising God!]

Q: How do you think it would affect you if you had been one of the relatives, and all of sudden Zechariah was able to speak again after nine months of not being able to talk? [Let people engage - Zechariah’s speaking further heightens the miraculous nature of this event, and thus its importance]

V.66: As the word spread throughout the hill country, what was the lingering question? [“What then is this child going to be?”]

Q: Why was this question asked? [Because the name given to a newborn was supposed to signify what the child’s purpose would be in life. They had no idea what “John” meant, so they were stumped.]

Transition: This was a powerful question that deserved an answer. What is John going to be?! Zechariah gladly answers this question in the remainder of this chapter. And as we read his answer, let’s pay attention to John’s role in which we learn some key **ELEMENTS** of the salvation message. Let’s read.

**[Read Luke 1:67-80]**

V.67:

- His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

V.68:

- “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has **redeemed** his people.

V.69:

- He has raised up a horn of **salvation** for us in the house of his servant David

V.70:

- (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

V.71:

- **salvation** from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—

V.72:

- to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,

V.73:

- the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

V.74:

- to **rescue** us from the hand of our enemies, and to **enable us to serve him without fear**

V.75:

- in **holiness and righteousness** before him all our days.

V.76:

- And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

V.77:

- to give his people the knowledge of **salvation** through the **forgiveness of their sins**,

V.78:

- because of the **tender mercy of our God**, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven.

V.79:

- to **shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death**, to **guide our feet into the path of peace.**”

V.80:

- And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.67-68: Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit in order to prophesy God's Word. What does he praise the God of Israel for? [He is coming to redeem His people]

Q: What does "redeem" mean? [the act of gaining possession in exchange for a payment]

Q: So what did the transaction look like? [Christ paid the penalty of our sins, which was death, in return to gaining us back for "whosoever would believe" upon Him.]

Q V.69-70: Who is Zechariah referring to when he says "He has raised up a **horn of salvation**?" [Christ - (The horn symbolizes power and victory.)]

Q: Where did the Redeemer come from? [He came from the house of David (Luke 1:69), who himself was a great conqueror. God had promised that the Saviour would be a Jew (Gen. 12:1-3), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), from the family of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), born in David's city, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Both Mary (Luke 1:27) and Joseph (Matt. 1:20) belonged to David's line. The coming of the Redeemer was inherent in the covenants God made with His people (Luke 1:72), and it was promised by the prophets (Luke 1:70).]

**Observation:** The salvation Jesus brought is a strong Lukan theme. The term "Savior" is found four times in Luke/Acts (Luke 1:47; 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23) appears only once in the other Gospels (John 4:42); "salvation" is found ten times in Luke-Acts but only once in the other Gospels (John 4:22); and the verb "to save" is found seventeen times in Luke (more than any other Gospel) and thirteen times in Acts.

Q 71-75: If someone came up to you and asked, "What is salvation?" what would you tell them? [Let people engage]

Q: What are we saved from? [The penalty of our sins, which is death and eternal separation from God.]

Q: When you look at verses 74-75, what this first thing that comes with our salvation? [We're rescued from the hands of our enemies]

Q: What does that look like spiritually? [Let people engage]

Q: What's the second thing that comes with our salvation? [We are enabled to serve Him without fear]

Q: How interesting. What does it mean to serve "without fear?" [Let people engage]

Q V.75: What's the third and fourth thing that comes with our salvation? [Holiness and righteousness]

Q: What does that look like for us at a practical level? [Let people engage]

Q V.76-79: Zechariah finally gets to a more specific answer as to what John will do! Let's name them one by one:

- John will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him
- He will give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins
- He will share the tender mercy of God
- He will shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death
- He will lead people by guiding their feet to a path of peace

Q: I stated early on that I wanted us to pay attention to the ELEMENTS of the gospel message. Based on today's study, what should we include in our conversations with others? [Let people engage]

Q V.80: What does it mean that John "grew strong in spirit?" [in human spirit he had an inner vitality and fortitude. His living **in the desert** till the time of his public appearance was not normal for a young person. But because of the special mission which John knew from an early age he would perform, he chose to follow the role of Elijah (cf. v. 17) by living in a desolate area. For in only a brief period of time John's ministry would catapult him into prominence.]

**LOOK:**

Salvation has always been God's plan, and we are all responsible for sharing it. May we be faithful to share the elements of salvation by including how Christ redeemed us, that salvation is through the forgiveness of sins, and rescues us from darkness, and enables us to serve him without fear.

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 174–175). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

**Praise (Luke 1:57–80)**

God's blessing was resting abundantly on Zacharias and Elizabeth. He sent them a baby boy, just as He promised; and they named him "John" just as God had instructed. The Jews looked on children as a gift from God and a "heritage from the Lord" (Pss. 127:3–5; 128:1–3), and rightly so, for they are. Israel would not follow the practices of their pagan neighbors by aborting or abandoning their children. When you consider that 1–1/2 million babies are aborted each year in the United States alone, you can see how far we have drifted from the laws of God.

"The greatest forces in the world are not the earthquakes and the thunderbolts," said Dr. E.T. Sullivan. "The greatest forces in the world are babies."

Traditionally, a baby boy would be named after his father or someone else in the family; so the relatives and neighbors were shocked when Elizabeth insisted on the name *John*. Zacharias wrote "His name is John" on a tablet, and that settled it! Immediately God opened the old priest's mouth, and he sang a hymn that gives us four beautiful pictures of what the coming of Jesus Christ to earth really means.

***The opening of a prison door (v. 68).*** The word *redeem* means "to set free by paying a price." It can refer to the releasing of a prisoner or the liberating of a slave. Jesus Christ came to earth to bring "deliverance to the captives" (Luke 4:18), salvation to people in bondage to sin and death. Certainly we are unable to set ourselves free; only Christ could pay the price necessary for our redemption (Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–21).

***The winning of a battle (vv. 69–75).*** In Scripture, a horn symbolizes power and victory (1 Kings 22:11; Ps. 89:17, 24). The picture here is that of an army about to be taken captive, but then help arrives and the enemy is defeated. In the previous picture, the captives were set free; but in this picture, the enemy is defeated *so that he cannot capture more prisoners*. It means total victory for the people of God.

The word *salvation* (Luke 1:69, 71) carries the meaning of "health and soundness." No matter what the condition of the captives, their Redeemer brings spiritual soundness. When you trust Jesus Christ as Saviour, you are delivered from Satan's power, moved into God's kingdom, redeemed, and forgiven (Col. 1:12–14).

Where did the Redeemer come from? He came from the house of David (Luke 1:69), who himself was a great conqueror. God had promised that the Saviour would be a Jew (Gen. 12:1–3), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), from the family of David (2 Sam. 7:12–16), born in David's city, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Both Mary (Luke 1:27) and Joseph (Matt. 1:20) belonged to David's line. The coming of the Redeemer was inherent in the covenants God made with His people (Luke 1:72), and it was promised by the prophets (Luke 1:70).

Note that the results of this victory are sanctity and service (Luke 1:74–75). He sets us free, not to do our own will, because that would be bondage, but to do His will and enjoy His freedom.

***The canceling of a debt (vv. 76–77).*** *Remission* means "to send away, to dismiss, as a debt." All of us are in debt to God because we have broken His law and failed to live up to His standards (Luke 7:40–50). Furthermore, all of us are spiritually bankrupt, unable to pay our debt. But Jesus came and paid the debt for us (Ps. 103:12; John 1:29).

*The dawning of a new day* (vv. 78–79). *Dayspring* means “sunrise.” The people were sitting in darkness and death, and distress gripped them when Jesus came; but He brought light, life, and peace. It was the dawn of a new day because of the tender mercies of God (see Matt. 4:16).

The old priest had not said anything for nine months, but he certainly compensated for his silence when he sang this song of praise to God! And how joyful he was that his son was chosen by God to prepare the way for the Messiah (Isa. 40:1–3; Mal. 3:1). John was “prophet of the Highest” (Luke 1:76), introducing to Israel “the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32) who was conceived in Mary’s womb by “the power of the Highest” (Luke 1:35).

Instead of enjoying a comfortable life as a priest, John lived in the wilderness, disciplining himself physically and spiritually, waiting for the day when God would send him out to prepare Israel for the arrival of the Messiah. People like Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25–38) had been waiting for this day for many years, and soon it would come.

God calls us today to believe His Good News. Those who believe it experience His joy and want to express their praise to Him. It is not enough for us to say that Jesus is *a Saviour, or even the Saviour*. With Mary, we must say, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God *my Saviour*” (Luke 1:47, italics mine).

**Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 206-207)**

1. THE BIRTH AND MATURATION OF JOHN (1:57–80).

a. *John’s birth* (1:57–66).

1:57–66. The record of John’s birth is given in a single verse (v. 57), with friends sharing in the **joy**. Several verses then focus on and emphasize the obedience of Zechariah and Elizabeth. The old couple was careful to follow the Law in the circumcision of the boy. Though others objected, Elizabeth said that he was to be named **John**, which Zechariah confirmed in **writing**. The fact that Zechariah **immediately** was able **to speak** amazed the crowd. As was true of each person in the account, Zechariah was praising (*eulogōn*, “was blessing”; cf. *eulogēmōnē* in v. 42) **God**. Word then spread through **the whole hill country** (in the Jerusalem area) that this was an unusual child. The people continued to note that **the Lord’s hand was with him**. Years later, when John began his preaching ministry, many went out from this district who no doubt remembered the amazing events surrounding his birth (Matt. 3:5).

b. *Zechariah’s prophesy and psalm* (1:67–79).

1:67–79. This psalm, known as “the Benedictus,” is filled with Old Testament quotations and allusions. Zechariah expounded four ideas.

1. **Zechariah** gave an exhortation to **praise ... God** (v. 68a).

2. Zechariah noted the reason God should be praised—**He has come and has redeemed His people** (v. 68b).

3. Zechariah described the deliverance for Israel through the Messiah (vv. 69–75). The Messiah was to be Israel’s **horn of salvation** (v. 69). The horns of an animal symbolized its power. Thus the Messiah would be strong and would deliver the nations **from her enemies** (v. 74). Of special import in these verses is the mention of **His holy covenant, the oath God swore to our father Abraham** (vv. 72–73; cf. Gen. 22:16–18).

4. Zechariah prophetically described the ministry John would have (Luke 1:76–79). Zechariah had understood the message of the angel, so he foretold that John would be the one to **go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him** (cf. Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1). He would be a **prophet of the Most High** (Luke 1:76; cf. v. 32). Verse 77 may refer to the Lord rather than to John. However, John did preach the same message of **forgiveness of... sins** (cf. 3:3).

c. *John's growth and seclusion (1:80).*

1:80. As John **grew**, he **became strong in spirit**, that is, in human spirit he had an inner vitality and fortitude. His living **in the desert** till the time of his public appearance was not normal for a young person. But because of the special mission which John knew from an early age he would perform, he chose to follow the role of Elijah (cf. v. 17) by living in a desolate area. For in only a brief period of time John's ministry would catapult him into prominence.

**Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 97–102). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

**1:57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby.** Compare 2:6 (Gen 25:24) for a similar miracle and vocabulary.

**1:58 Her neighbors and relatives heard.** Apparently, Elizabeth remained in seclusion throughout her pregnancy.

**The Lord has shown her great mercy.** Compare Luke 1:25 and Gen 19:19 for similar terminology. One should not seek to find here a play on the Hebrew name for John (*Yohanan*, meaning *Yahweh has given grace*), for this would have been much too subtle for Luke's Greek readers who would not have been able to understand a Hebrew pun such as this.

**And they shared her joy.** This joy is a partial fulfillment of Luke 1:14. Later in the description of Jesus' birth, Luke would parallel this with the shepherds' joy (2:10).

**1:59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child.** Here Luke pointed out John the Baptist's Jewish origin. This will be paralleled in 2:21 with Jesus' circumcision and naming. Note also how Paul in Phil 3:5 pointed out his Jewishness in a similar manner. Circumcision was the covenant mark (cf. Gen 17:12–14; 21:4; Lev 12:3). It is irrational for a Gentile believer to be anti-Semitic when the leading heroes of the faith (John the Baptist, Paul, Peter, the apostles, the OT saints, and above all the Savior of the world) were Jewish.

**And they were going to name him.** We find a parallel to this naming of John the Baptist at his circumcision in the following account about Jesus (Luke 2:21), but it was more common to name a child at birth (cf. Gen 4:1; 21:3; 25:25–26). It was unusual to name a son after his father, since a man tended to be identified as (*John*) son of (*Zechariah*), i.e., (*John*), Bar-(*Zechariah*); and Zechariah Bar-Zechariah would have been strange.

**1:60** How Elizabeth knew that the name to be given was John is not stated. Zechariah probably revealed this to her along with what happened to him in the temple (cf. Luke 1:13).

**John.** The etymological meaning of the name is not stated, and it is doubtful that Luke's readers knew it. Nothing therefore should be made of it. For Luke what was important for his readers was to know that the birth and role of the one they knew as John the Baptist were divinely foreordained.

**1:62** Zechariah was both deaf and mute (cf. 1:22, 64), so they appealed to him by means of signs. He responded by means of writing (1:63). These two infirmities are often associated with each other (cf. Mark 7:32, 37; 9:25).



**1:63 He asked for a writing tablet.** The writing tablet consisted of a wood tablet (a *pinakidion*) covered with wax.

**To everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John."** Why the astonishment? Probably this was because "John" was not a name used in their family and because Zechariah was not able to hear Elizabeth's choice of this name. Since Zechariah was mute, he could not "say" anything. The NIV translation recognizes this.

**1:64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed.** Zechariah's speaking further heightens the miraculous nature of this event, and thus its importance. It also fulfills the angel Gabriel's word in 1:20. The neighbors (and the readers) realized that God would work great things through this child.

**And he began to speak, praising God.** Zechariah is a model of an ideal believer. His first words were used in praise of God. These words are found in the Benedictus of 1:68f., which begins, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel." The importance of the praising or blessing (*eulogōn*) for Luke is evident.

**1:65 The neighbors were all filled with awe.** "All" here, later in this verse, and in 1:66 should not be pressed. It probably means "many." "Awe" is literally *fear* (*phobos*, Compare 1:12 and 1:30). Awe, or fear, is the proper reverent attitude which those who witness a heavenly intervention or manifestation of divine power should express. It may begin as a terrifying fear of judgment or wrath, but it progresses to a holy awe of God and a recognition of his otherness, which leads to "glorifying and praising God" (cf. 2:10, 20; 5:26; 7:16). This experience at John's birth is paralleled at Jesus' birth (2:17–18). See comments on 23:40.

**And throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.** This comment by Luke enhances John the Baptist's importance and role as well as the magnitude of this event. Clearly Luke in no way sought to minimize John's importance.

**1:66 Everyone ... wondered.** Compare 2:19, 51; 3:15; 5:22 (cf. also 1 Sam 21:13–14; Mal 2:2 [LXX]). This again heightens the importance of these events.

**What then is this child going to be?** The use of *what* instead of *who* emphasizes John the Baptist's *role* as the one who will go before his superior, i.e., the Messiah, and prepare his way. John was important not in himself but because he assisted in preparing for Jesus. Luke sought to help his readers, who knew of John the Baptist's importance, to understand that his importance was due to his role in preparing the way for the One greater than he.

**For the Lord's hand was with him.** This is better understood as an editorial comment than as part of the preceding quotation due to the change in the tense of the verb (an imperfect instead of a future). "Hand of the Lord," is a common OT expression for God's powerful presence.

**1:67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.** Just as Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:41), so was Zechariah. See comments on 1:15. Since Zechariah was a reliable witness due to his character (1:6) and his being filled by the Spirit, the hymn that follows reveals the divine understanding of the relationship of John the Baptist to Jesus and their respective roles.

**1:68** What follows in 1:68–75 consists of a single sentence in Greek.

**Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel.** The verb "be" (rather than "is"), although not in the text, is assumed. Even as Mary in the Magnificat (1:46–47) began with a word of praise, so Zechariah in the Benedictus began similarly.

**Because he has come and has redeemed his people.** The "because" indicates that what follows is understood to be the cause of the preceding praise. The past tenses (aorists) witness to the fact that the promised time of salvation has already come. God has already in the events

recorded in 1:5–67 visited his people, and although the “redemption” awaits the future work of the Son of God, its certainty is such that a past tense corresponding to a prophetic perfect can be used to describe this future event (cf. 1:50). In this hymn Luke understood the work of John the Baptist and Jesus as two parts of the same divine visitation. The term “came” or “visited” appears in 1:78; 7:16; Acts 15:14 (cf. Gen 21:1; Exod 4:31; Ruth 1:6; Jer 15:15), and “redeemed” is found in Luke 2:38; 21:28; 24:21 and is a synonym for “salvation” found in 1:69, 77. The Dead Sea Scrolls also refer to God’s having visited his people and having raised up the teacher of righteousness.

**1:69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us.** The image of a horn symbolized the strength of the animal. Since John the Baptist is not linked to the house of David (Luke 1:69b; cf. Ps 132:17), the “horn” refers not to him but to the Messiah he was announcing. The fifteenth benediction of the *Shemonah Ezreh*, a Jewish prayer dating from the first century, states, “Blessed be Thou, O God, who causeth the horn of salvation to sprout forth.” The salvation Jesus brought is a strong Lukan theme. The term “Savior” found in Luke 1:47; 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23 appears only once in the other Gospels (John 4:42); “salvation” is found ten times in Luke-Acts but only once in the other Gospels (John 4:22); and the verb “to save” is found seventeen times in Luke (more than any other Gospel) and thirteen times in Acts. This salvation is not primarily concerned with political matters but with the individual’s relationship to God. It involves the individual’s “life” (Luke 9:24) and is for those who recognize that they are “lost” (19:10). It comes through faith and involves the forgiveness of sins (1:77). See comments on 7:50.

**In the house of his servant David.** See comments on 1:27. Compare 2 Sam 7:12–16.

**1:70 As he said through his holy prophets of long ago.** This parenthetical comment, probably from Luke, emphasizes the theme of prophetic fulfillment. See Introduction 7 (1). The Greek text uses the expression “through the mouth of his holy prophets.”

**1:71 Salvation from our enemies.** This terminology comes from such OT passages as Pss 18:17; 106:10; 2 Sam 22:18. The “enemies” are further described in this verse as those who “hate us.” Luke understood this less as a political and nationalistic deliverance from enemies than as an OT metaphorical description of personal salvation from sin (Luke 1:77) and judgment. See comments on 1:69. In the case of physical healings, the healing usually serves as a type of the individual’s spiritual salvation. This is how, according to Luke, John the Baptist understood the salvation the Coming One brings as witnessed in John’s message (3:7–14). Nevertheless there is a sense in which believers will be saved from their enemies at the parousia (18:7–8; 21:27–28).

**1:72 To show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.** This begins the second major part of the hymn. The two parts of this verse stand in synonymous parallelism with each other and describe two aspects of the same idea. For Luke the coming of Christ clearly did not bring the creation of a new religion but the fulfillment of the covenantal promises God made to the saints of the OT. See comments on 1:5–25—“The Lukan Message”.

**1:73 The oath he swore to our father Abraham.** Compare Gen 17:4; 22:16–17. For “father Abraham” see Josh 24:3; Isa 51:2.

**1:74 To rescue us from the hand of our enemies.** Compare Ps 97:10. This clause and the next verse give the oath’s content. Again Luke understood this rescue figuratively. It involves the kind of salvation that we read of in the rest of Luke-Acts and that is exemplified by such passages as Acts 2:37–41.

**Without fear.** This expression appears emphatically as the first word of this verse in Greek. It could go with the participle “rescue” but fits better with the infinitive “serve.”

**1:75** The Benedictus, begun in Luke 1:68, ends at this point.

**1:76** This verse begins the second major part of the hymn honoring the miraculously born child whom God has appointed for his service. There is a change of tense at this point, from the past tense, which describes what God had already begun to do, to the future tense, which speaks specifically of John's future mission.

**Will be called a prophet of the Most High.** As in 1:35 this is not simply a prediction of what John would be called but primarily of what he would be. God would make John his prophet. John is called a prophet in 7:26 and 16:16. The one whom John announced, however, would be called "the Son of God" (1:35).

**For you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for him.** This clause provides the reason for John's prophetic status. John's preparatory role already has been stated in 1:15, 17 and prepares the reader for its fulfillment in 3:4 and 7:27. "Lord" (and "him") is best understood in light of 3:4; 7:27 and John's preparatory role, namely, as a reference to Jesus (cf. 1:43) rather than to God (Yahweh) as in 1:15–16.

**1:77 To give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.** This verse explains how John prepared Jesus' way. The expression "through the forgiveness of sins" defines salvation and reveals that Luke understood the Benedictus to refer to a spiritual rather than a political salvation. John's role is not being contrasted here with that of Jesus, for repentance and baptism leading to forgiveness and salvation are intimately associated with the preaching of both. The main difference is that the eschatological gift of the Spirit would be given to Jesus' disciples, but not to John's. This, however, must wait until after Jesus' glorification. Here "knowledge" is not theoretical but rather the experiencing of this salvation by means of the forgiveness of sins.

**Forgiveness of sins.** This important Lukan theological emphasis is found in key places throughout Luke-Acts. It is mentioned in the overall summary of John the Baptist's message in 3:3 and is mentioned in both Jesus' sermonic summary of his mission (4:18) and his great commission to the disciples after his resurrection (24:47). It is also found in the conclusion of the introductory sermon of Acts (2:38), in the explanation of God's having accepted the Gentiles apart from circumcision (Acts 10:43), in Paul's defense before Agrippa (26:18), and in two other sermons in Acts (5:31; 13:38). The redemption with which God visits his people is not a political liberation but rather a salvation that involves the forgiveness of sins.

**1:78 Because of the tender mercy of our God.** The reason this salvation is possible, i.e., its cause, picks up the thought of Luke 1:72.

**The rising sun.** This is an enigmatic and most difficult phrase. In 1:76–77 Luke clearly referred to John the Baptist, since in 1:76 the allusions to Mal 3:1 and Isa 40:3 are used of his mission elsewhere (cf. Luke 3:4) and 1:77 contains terminology used of John's baptism (cf. 3:3). Nevertheless it is most unlikely that the phrase "the rising sun" refers to John the Baptist, for the present context (1:78–79) refers to Jesus' works. (Note how the terminology of 1:79 is used for Jesus in Matt 4:16.) Suggestions about what "rising sun" (*anatolē*) means include the rising of a star or sun, a metaphor for Yahweh (but 1:78a seems to distinguish God from *anatolē*), the shoot or offspring of David (Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12), and the star from Jacob (Num 24:17). At the present time it is impossible to be certain about the exact meaning Luke intended. It seems best to assume he was in some way referring to the coming of the Messiah—Son of God—and leave it at that.

**1:79 To shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.** This picks up the image of “the rising sun” in the previous verse. Compare Ps 106:10 (LXX) for this terminology (cf. also Isa 9:2; 42:7; 49:9).

**To guide our feet into the path [way] of peace.** John prepared the way of the Messiah (Luke 1:76), which is the way of peace. Compare Acts 10:36.

**1:80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit.** We find parallel statements describing Jesus’ growth in Luke 2:40 (the first seven words [six words in Greek] are identical) and 2:52. (Cf. Gen 21:8; Judg 13:24–25; 1 Sam 2:21, 26.) In light of Luke 1:15, 41, 67 “spirit” here may refer to the Holy Spirit.

**And he lived in the desert [wilderness] until he appeared publicly to Israel.** With this conclusion to the narrative Luke prepared the reader for 3:2, where John once again appeared “in the desert [wilderness].” Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there has been much speculation about whether John the Baptist was a member of the Qumran community, which produced these scrolls. While parallels between John and the Essenes permit all sorts of speculation, at the present time no definitive decision can be made. Even if John were once a member of the Qumran community, this would have no real bearing on understanding the Lukan portrait of John since Luke made no reference to this.