

Characters Of Christmas

Finding Spiritual Significance Among The Insignificant

An Expository Study of Select Gospel Texts

Written By

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The Christmas story is all about God employing virtual nobodies to welcome the birth of His Son and to help carry forward His gospel message. It's a well-worn story God has used and still uses. Take, for instance, the story of a poor, disadvantaged boy named George who was born during the Christmas season of December 16, 1714.

His father, Thomas, a struggling inn keeper in Gloucester, England, died when his youngest son was only two years old. The loss impacted George for years to come. Watching his dear mother, Elizabeth, doing all she could to hold the financially strapped family together, he dropped out of school at age fifteen to help her with the inn. He never like school anyway and didn't think it would benefit him in the long run.

Sitting up late on many nights to run the inn, George started passing his time reading the Bible. Really, the endeavor consumed him. Upon the advice of a young Oxford student who happened to be staying at the inn, George decided he'd better go back to school. At 17, he attended Pembroke College at Oxford, and while there he life path crossed with one Charles Wesley. Wesley gave him a book which would forever change his life. Its title? *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. He was twenty years old when he finished the book, and the rest of his life he never forgot how that book led him to a personal, vibrant faith relationship with the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Shortly after his new spiritual birth, George had to leave school for a long nine months because of a medical issue. While living at home, the local bishop of Gloucester noticed the gifts and abilities of this Oxford student and ordained him first a deacon and then a priest in the Church of England. On June 20, 1736, after George, the former struggling student, finished his degree at Oxford, he, a virtual nobody by man's standards, received the commission of the

Church and went out to be a priest of God with his life. The world was never the same because of the ministry of George, George Whitfield, that is.

When the population of London was only 700,000 at the time, 20,000 people would come to hear the booming voice coming out of a small-framed, thinly built preacher named George. His preaching became so powerful, so moving that thousands came to Christ, and he, who had been strapped and diminished in so many ways, received the blessing of God as he sailed across the Atlantic thirteen times to preach and teach in America.

Prior to the American Revolution, George's spell-binding, soul-searching preaching, gave momentum to the Christian revival called the Great Awakening. Thirty thousand people at a time would gather to hear him breathe life into stale doctrine and ancient, dusty biblical texts, and many walked away with a new love of the Messiah, Jesus. Even Benjamin Franklin, of all people, became one of his good friends. Colonial presses doubled their output from 1739 through 1742 because of his voluminous writing, and that is where his non-Christian friend, Benjamin came in as a trusted printer.

Desiring for Benjamin to have a faith relationship with the Savior, George once challenged him:

As you have made pretty considerable progress in the mysteries of electricity, I would now humbly recommend to your diligent unprejudiced pursuit and study the mystery of the new birth.¹

Benjamin always accepted his friend, but he never accepted the challenge.

George, also, never accepted all the money which came in from his writings, choosing to donate the majority of it to charitable organizations and a key orphanage in Georgia. What a man of integrity. He who came from nothing gave back the blessing God bestowed on his life.

What a tool in the hands of the living God. It is estimated that he preached twice daily during his pastoral career, meaning he spoke over 18,000 sermons. I've preached for twenty-five years. Crunching all the numbers over the years, I've only spoken 1,978 times. And sometimes I struggle with preaching four times on Sundays. I've got a long way to go to walk in the shoes of Whitfield. What a man of God.

He died at my age, 56, in 1770. A tragic loss for the world. A major gain for heaven.²

George Whitfield was a living, walking testimony of how God can, and will, take people from the most obscure, insignificant, difficult backgrounds and use them to His glory to advance the gospel message concerning His Son, Jesus, the Christ. As I've said, it was not the first time God acted in this fashion, nor was it the first time God worked in the life of young boy whose mother was named Elizabeth. Almost 1,800 years earlier, God worked through another woman named Elizabeth and her husband, Zacharias, an old, insignificant priest in Israel. God graciously gave them a child in their old age ... no, scratch that. God gave them *the* child, or the prophesied one who would become the forerunner of the Messiah himself.

God's key angel, Gabriel, made Zacharias a temporary deaf mute because he didn't believe the birth announcement from God. For nine long months he couldn't speak about the angel he had encountered, nor could he hear any conversations. The mouth which had spoken in

¹ Thomas S. Kidd, *The Billy Graham of Colonial America*, Wall Street Journal, December 4, 2014.

² George Whitfield, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/whitfield>.

unbelief and the ears which didn't listen to God's intended blessing on his life were judged until the time when faith rose in his heart. We encounter that amazing, moving moment in Episode four in Luke 1:57-80 where we get a high definition picture of ...

Zacharias: A Man Who Moved From Solitude To Gratitude (Luke 1:57-80)

Moving from a personal conflict with no resolution in sight, Dr. Luke guides us to yet another unexpected conflict in Episode #4.

Episode #4: Family Feud (Luke 1:57-63)

Ever had a family feud? Ever verbally duked it out at what you thought would be a joyous time? Elizabeth and Zacharias got into a feud with the folks closest to them on a day which should have been full of great joy. God would turn the tussle into a flash of spiritual insight. To appreciate what happened, we must first consider ...

The Problem (Luke 1:57-63).

⁵⁷ Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.

⁵⁸ Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her. ⁵⁹ And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.

The setting is nine months (or thereabouts depending on how quickly Elizabeth conceived) after Zacharias found out from Gabriel that he and Elizabeth would be the proud parents of the long-awaited messianic forerunner (Malachi 4:4-6). After the child was born, friends and family packed the home for the circumcision of the child on the eighth day to watch his circumcision so he would become a child of Israel and one obligated to the Mosaic Law (Genesis 17:11; Galatians 4:25; Leviticus 12:3). It couldn't have been a happier, more joyous occasion.

Then a family feud suddenly broke out. Why? Because the relatives expected for the child to be named, as they typically were by Jewish custom, after the father, you know, Zacharias Senior and Zacharias Junior. I'm sure many of them said something like, "Zacharias and Elizabeth, we can't wait for you to call your new blessing from God after Zacharias. Oh, this is so exciting."

None of this "meddling" went over well with Elizabeth. The grammatical structure of the text says it all:

⁶⁰ But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John."

The negative, "No" at the beginning of the sentence followed by the strong adversative *alla* (ἀλλὰ), drew the line in the proverbial sand and stood as a complete rebuke to the friends and family.

Οὐχί ἀλλὰ κληθήσεται Ἰωάννης

Elizabeth's rebuke met with argumentation.

⁶¹ And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name."

Translated, "Are you out of your cultural mind? Nobody in your family line is named John, so you can't choose that name. It has to be Zacharias." Admit it. Most arguments come when you least expect them. And most perpetrators don't drop their viewpoint too easily. These folks didn't. Seeking support for their position, they turned to the deaf and mute Zacharias who had no clue what all the commotion was about:

⁶² And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.

His reply isn't just classic, it was bathed in complete faith in the word the angel have given him nine months prior.

⁶³ And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished.

He either wrote John, or *Yehohanan* in Hebrew (יהוהנן), or *Yoannas* in Greek (Ἰωάννης) on the board to everyone's amazement. I'm sure Jewish jaws hit the proverbial floor when they rested their eyes on that name on that little board. John? Yes, John.

Why a name different from their family name? Because God wanted to show that this man was His man ready to do His bidding to prepare the way for the Messiah and His glorious, all-important ministry. God also wanted the forerunner's name to be John for its meaning as "God is gracious" certainly described what God was doing as He sovereignly prepared to set the stage for the One who would come and secure salvation for sinners. John. What a perfect, providential name. This name spoke of God's rich grace while pointing to the One who would be the essence of grace; namely, Jesus, the Messiah.

With the narrative conflict now resolved, the story didn't end. No, it pivots in the hand of God to speak about the importance of praise concerning how God carefully and strategically worked to bring the messianic forerunner and then the Messiah to the earth through the most insignificant of people.

The Praise (Luke 1:64-80).

I remember standing at the base of a small dam in the Imperial Valley as a kid, playing with my best friend Kenny Elder and my sisters on a sand bar, as my mother and Kenny's mother sat on a blanket on the shoreline. We had a great time playing in the knee deep, slow moving water in the hot desert sun.

Then it happened.

A loud horn blew once, then twice. My mother and Margie started screaming and waving their arms, motioning for us to get back to the shore as they ran toward us. We moved so fast we virtually walked on water. For once, the mothers had no arguments from us.

Sitting on the shoreline, we watched as the gates slowly opened and water started shooting out like a geyser, causing the water level to quickly rise where we had formerly been swimming. The event was both ominous and beautiful.

This is but a faint description of what happened to Zacharias as faith flooded his heart and mind. Like a mighty flow of water, his faith in the word of the angel, Gabriel, as delivered from the throne of God Almighty, busted forth like a mighty geyser of divine praise.

⁶⁴ And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he *began* to speak in praise of God.

A geyser of praise to God. Is this not what we are supposed to be, especially this Christmas season? Indeed. For nine months he'd been unable to speak about the most amazing event not just in his life, but in the life of Israel during 400 years of divine darkness. For nine months he'd been unable to articulate to God just how appreciative and humbled he and Elizabeth were at God's gracious choice of them, of all people, as the messianic forerunner's parents. But, now, with ears which could hear and vocal chords which could function properly, all of his praise for God's wondrous provision for he and his wife and Israel gushed uncontrollably and joyously from his mouth.

Oh, God, might praise for the birth of the Messiah gush from our lips.

Oh, God, might we praise you for the fact you use us, virtual nobodies by the world's standards, to speak of the wonder of His birth.

The divine praise of Zacharias was so profound, so powerful it touched all the friends and family who had formerly been feuding:

⁶⁵ Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child *turn out to be*?"

Amazing. The words of Zacharias toward God moved the people from asking, "Why are you going to name him, John?" to "What in the world will this young child become in his lifetime? What will God do in and through him?" Such is the nature of divine praise, especially where it's focused on the person and work of the Messiah, Jesus. It moves people to consider what God is and will do. All of this, of course, makes you ask yourself a highly personal question this Christmas: "Is my public praise of the person and work of the Messiah, Jesus, so magnanimous, so massive it creates excitement and wonder in the lives of those who hear it?" Or am I afraid to even utter those verboten words *Merry Christmas*? Praise, my friend, praise for the providential work of God to save sinners through the babe of Bethlehem knows no restraint.

God was all over Zacharias, and Zacharias was all over God in praise. Dr. Luke tells us this much:

For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him. ⁶⁷ And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

At the moment of conversion we, as believers, are indwelt by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14); however, being filled and controlled by Him is a matter of yieldedness, as we learn from Paul in Ephesians 5:18.

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit ...

Divine filling comes as we submit to God's leadership and teaching in our lives. Divine filling comes as we say "no" to ourselves and "yes" to God. Divine filling, by definition, results in a heart, a mind, and a mouth full of praise to God. You might need to read that again. Paul says this much with the ensuing verses:

¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

See the relationship between being filled and controlled by the Spirit and singing praise and giving praise to God? How can you miss it?

What, then, should our Christmas look like this year? It should be one where we are walking so intimately, so closely with Jesus, the Messiah, that praise for Him so fills us we just gush forth with praise for him individually and corporately. This is what Leah did when she bore her last child, Judah, who would become the forefather of Jesus, the Messiah:

³⁵ And she conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him ^{2a}Judah. Then she stopped bearing (Genesis 29).

Moses acted in the same fashion after God's deliverance from Egypt:

² The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him (Exodus 15).

Deborah burst into praise for God who delivered Israel miraculously from their dreaded enemy, Sisera, the Canaanite:

³ Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I-- to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel (Judges 5).

Both of these last references originate in passages known as songs of praise to God for His absolute care and provision for His people. As the people considered His miraculous, magnanimous actions they logically and naturally broke into well-articulated and pointed praise. Such is what occurs as when God's people brush up against and experience the work of God to accomplish His lofty, eternal purposes. Like Zacharias, the Spirit of God so fills them, they can't help but sing praise to Him.

Is this a picture of your life this Christmas? As you sing *Away in a Manger* is it coming from a heart truly thankful for the Lord who was willing to be born in this out-of-the-way, sub-prime location? As you sing the *Revelation Song*, do you feel as if you are standing with the holy angels around the throne of God giving Him praise for who He is and what He has accomplished through the birth of the Savior? If praise has been bottled up in you for nine months, then you might need to pray the prayer of David, one which he uttered after he came clean from his marital infidelity:

O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare your praise (Psalm 51:15).

Zacharias had sinned in his unbelief, but now praise for God gushed from his mouth as he wrapped his mind and heart around God's plan to use him and Elizabeth to, at long last, to set the stage for the arrival of the King of King and Lord of Lords, Jesus, the Christ. May the same happen in your life this Christmas.

What, exactly, formed the content of Zacharias' praise? We'll spend two studies opening up the answer to this intriguing, enlightening question. For our purposes in this study, we'll limit ourselves to the first praise section directed, and rightly so, to the Messiah (Luke 1:68-75). This wonderful, joyous praise from Zacharias commenced with this familiar biblical statement:

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, ...

Stop right there, please.

In Greek the phrase "Blessed be the Lord" is Εὐλογητὸς κύριος (in Hebrew it is: **יְהוָה בְּרִיךְ**), and where this unique adjectival/noun combination appears initially in the Old Testament is most instructive

We first encounter it in the LXX, the Septuagint or Greek version of the Old Testament, in Genesis 9:26 where Noah post-flood exclaims:

²⁶ He also said, Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant (Genesis 9).

Here Noah praises the LORD, Yahweh, the great covenantal God, for Shem, who would, in turn, become the progenitor of the Messianic line. Shem, the godly line, would be eight grandfathers removed from Abraham, the father and patriarch of the nation of Israel, the promised people of God through whom the Messiah would come (Shem, Genesis 5:32; Arphaxad, Genesis 10:22; Salah, Genesis 10:24; Eber, Genesis 10:24; Peleg, Genesis 11:18; Reu, Genesis 11:18; Serug, Genesis 11:20; Nahor, Genesis 11:22; Terah, Genesis 11:24, and Abraham, Genesis 11:26).

The second time this unusual Greek phrase is used it comes from the lips of Abraham's servant as he looked for a bride for the chosen son, Isaac.

²⁷ And he said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers" (Genesis 24).

Once more, finding Rebekah proved to be providential, and it would be through her marriage to Isaac God would work to bring forth Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, through which the Messiah would one day come to earth.

The third time we encounter this unique Greek phrase it is on the lips of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. He states:

¹⁰ So Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, *and* who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians (Exodus 18).

His words blessed God for working providentially to save Israel, but they'd also have an eschatological flavor to them as they'd look forward to the greater Moses, Jesus, who would free mankind from the slavery of sin on the cross. No wonder God should be blessed.

The fourth time we find this phrase used in the Old Testament it comes from the Jewish women who encouraged Naomi who had lost her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:16-22), and was left with a key, but Gentile, daughter-in-law, Ruth.

¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD (Hebrew: בְּרַךְ יְהוָה Greek: εὐλογητὸς κύριος) who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel (Ruth 4).

We could spend several studies just focusing on this word "redeemer," *goel*. Boaz did his family duty, according to the Mosaic law, by marrying Ruth, and through their marriage the chosen line of Shem would be extended as they would become the proud great, great grandparents of King David, the flesh and blood picture of the coming King of all Davidic Kings, Jesus, the Messiah (Isaiah 9:1-6).

We could add several more biblical observations to this word usage, but for sake of time we stop here. Suffice it to say, when Zacharias burst forth into praise, it was praise based strategically on Bible verses he had, no doubt, studied well and were tied directly to the intricate, strategic work of God in bringing the Messiah to the earth to redeem mankind from a tough, hopeless situation, much like Boaz saved Ruth. This is why after he said God should be blessed, he added the reason why ...

... for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people.

The Greek word for "visit," (*episkeptomai, ἐπισκέπτομαι*) means to make a careful inspection of some situation in order to bring much needed help and assistance.³ Interestingly enough, it is

³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature*: 378.

ἐπισκέπτομαι mid. dep., fut. ἐπισκέψομαι LXX; 1 aor. ἐπεσκεψάμην; pf. ἐπέσκεμμαι LXX. Pass.: fut. 3 sg. ἐπισκεπήσεται 1 Km 20:18; aor. ἐπεσκέπην LXX; on the other hand, fut. 3 sg. ἐπισκεφθήσεται Jer 3:16; aor. subj. 3 sg. ἐπισκεφθῆ 1 Esdr 2:16 (s. σκοπέω; Trag., Hdt. +; s. B-D-F §101 p. 48 s.v. σκοπεῖν; Mlt-H. 258 s.v. -σκέπτομαι).

① to make a careful inspection, *look at, examine, inspect* (Hdt. 2, 109, 2 et al.) w. acc. (Diod S 12, 11, 4; Num 1:3; 1 Km 13:15; 2 Km 18:1) Hs 8, 2, 9; 8, 3, 3; 9, 10, 4; 1 Cl 25:5. Also *look for* with interest in selection, *select* w. acc. (PPetr II, 37, 2b verso 4 [III B.C.] ἐπισκεψάμενος ἐν ἀρχῇ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἔργα) ἄνδρας Ac 6:3.

utilized in the LXX of Genesis 21:1 where God visits a barren Sarah permitting her to have a son, Isaac. God had, most assuredly, visited Elizabeth in the same fashion and both visits served to further the messianic work of God, the Father.

To this Zacharias adds that God's visiting Elizabeth had set in motion the coming of the Messiah who would follow the forerunner, and who would be the final *goel* and/or redeemer. Though Zacharias uses a different word for redeemer than what we find in Ruth, the words were synonymous as pointed out by the Greek lexicographer Gerhard Kittel.⁴ Israel had waited for hundreds of years for the Redeemer of God. Isaiah prophesied of Him:

¹ "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² "For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. ³ "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ "Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, and your daughters will be carried in the arms. ⁵ "Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. ⁶ "A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD. ⁷ "All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth will minister to you; they will go up with acceptance on My altar, And I shall glorify My glorious house. ⁸ "Who are these who fly like a cloud and like the doves to their lattices? ⁹ "Surely the coastlands will wait for Me; And the ships of Tarshish *will come* first, To bring your sons from afar, Their silver and their gold with them, For the name of the LORD your God, And for the Holy One of Israel because He has glorified you. ¹⁰ "Foreigners will build up your walls, and their kings will minister to you; For in My wrath I struck you, and in My favor I have had compassion on you. ¹¹ "Your gates will be open continually; They will not be closed day or night, So that *men*

② to go to see a pers. with helpful intent, *visit* τινά *someone* (Demosth. 9, 12; PLille 6, 5 [III B.C.] διαβάντος μου ... ἐπισκέψασθαι τ. ἀδελφῆν; Judg 15:1) ἀνέβη ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ ἐπισκέψασθαι τοὺς ἀδελφούς αὐτοῦ (*Moses felt strongly about visiting his people* Ac 7:23 (for the note of solicitude cp. X., Mem. 3, 11, 10 φροντιστικῶς); 15:36. ἀλλήλους Hv 3, 9, 2. Esp. of visiting the sick (X., Mem. 3, 11, 10; Plut., Mor. 129c; Lucian, Philops. 6; Herodian 4, 2, 4; Sir 7, 35; TestJob 28:2; Jos., Ant. 9, 178) Mt 25:36, 43; Pol 6:1. W. special suggestion in the context on care to be bestowed: *look after* widows and orphans ἐν τῇ θλίψει αὐτῶν *in their distress* Js 1:27; cp. Hs 1:8. ὀρφανούς καὶ ὑστερουμένους Hm 8:10.

③ to exercise oversight in behalf of, *look after, make an appearance to help*, of divine oversight (Gen 21:1; 50:24f; Ex 3:16; 4:31; Sir 46:14; Jdth 8:33; En 25:3; TestLevi 16:5; PsSol 9:4; JosAs 7:35; Just. D. 29, 1) Lk 1:68. ἐπισκέπεται ἡμᾶς ἀνατολή ἐξ ὕψους vs. 78 (here the imagery is of dawning light that makes inspection possible, the divine inspection being for the benefit of the oppressed; NRSV 'break upon' shifts the imagery); τὸν λαόν 7:16 (cp. Ruth 1:6). Of the orphaned Joachim ἐπισκέπηταί με κύριος ὁ θεός μου GJs 1:4; ὅπως ἐπισκέπηταί με *so that (God) might come to my aid* 2:4 (sc. cod. A, s. Tdf.); ὅτι ἐπεσκέψατό με καὶ ἀφεῖλεν ... ὀνειδισμόν 6:3.—Hb 2:6 (Ps 8:5); *be concerned about* w. inf. foll. (s. B-D-F §392, 3) ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἔθνῶν λαόν *God concerned himself about winning a people fr. among the nations* Ac 15:14.—M-M. TW. Sv.³

⁴ Kittel, Vol. 4:329 offers a discussion of this lexical similarity.

may bring to you the wealth of the nations, With their kings led in procession. ¹² “For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly ruined. ¹³ “The glory of Lebanon will come to you, The juniper, the box tree and the cypress together, To beautify the place of My sanctuary; And I shall make the place of My feet glorious. ¹⁴ “The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; And they will call you the city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁵ “Whereas you have been forsaken and hated With no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting pride, A joy from generation to generation. ¹⁶ “You will also suck the milk of nations and suck the breast of kings; then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer (Redeemer רִגְאוֹל, or goel, and Savior/yasha מוֹשִׁיעַ), the Mighty One of Jacob. ¹⁷ “Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver, and instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron. And I will make peace your administrators and righteousness your overseers. ¹⁸ “Violence will not be heard again in your land, nor devastation or destruction within your borders; But you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise. ¹⁹ “No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory. ²⁰ “Your sun will no longer set, nor will your moon wane; for you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be over. ²¹ “Then all your people *will be* righteous; they will possess the land forever, the branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified. ²² “The smallest one will become a clan, and the least one a mighty nation. I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time” (Isaiah 60).

Tell me? Have these words been fulfilled. No. But with the coming of the forerunner and the Messiah, there was the electrified hope that the kingdom, as prophesied, was about to burst into human history. So excited and so overcome was Zacharias about this prophetic reality, that he used of the past tense (accomplished in verse 68). From his perspective the Messiah’s redemptive work was as good as complete. What faith from a man who formerly had been overcome by sheer unbelief. God should be blessed and praised for He has, in fact, sent the Redeemer and the Savior. Was this not the word of the angel to the shepherds?

¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2).

Is this not the description of Jesus?

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2).

Indeed, this is Him and is an apt description of His divine mission. He did what Zacharias said He would do: He can to redeem us from sin ... just like the Old Testament prophesied. What a perfect, precise point of praise for the person and work of God that first Christmas.

All of this leaves me asking myself a question I must pose to you: What perfect, precise praise are you going to give to Jesus this Christmas? You might be insignificant by worldly standards; however, in the halls of heaven, your praise always rings with great, resounding significance. Please, let God hear from your heart, your mind, and your mouth this Christmas.

Questions: What is, or will be, the content of your personal praise this Christmas Season? What words do you have to direct to God? What Bible passages will you allude to or reference in your praise for God's providential, salvific, and highly redemptive performance?