

# Characters Of Christmas

## Finding Spiritual Significance Among The Insignificant

### An Expository Study of Select Gospel Texts

Written By

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December 21, 2014



A friend of mine, Gerry Moore, built huge lakes in West Stockton, CA so custom homes could then be constructed around them. I dropped by to see him the day his workers readied themselves to open a massive subterranean gate to allow water from the Delta to flow into the man-made lake beds. Amazingly, when a worker turned the large steel wheel to open the gate, water just trickled out of the opening. It should have gushed out as if shot out of a cannon.

After several attempts to open the valve, located some thirty feet below ground in a vertical steel tube, they made arrangements to have a scuba diver enter the tube head first into the darkness with a rope around his ankle to discover what obstructed the flow of the much needed water. Let me be honest with you. There are just some jobs I'd never do no matter how much you paid me. Head first down into darkness in a scuba outfit? Count me out.

By way of illustration, this story serves as a perfect lead-in into the story of the deaf/mute priest in Israel Luke identifies as Zacharias (As a side note: some translations like the NIV call him Zechariah. Why the "discrepancy?" Zechariah is his Hebrew name, while Zacharias is his Greek name. Obviously, the KJV and the NAS translators went with the latter.) His problem was simple, though sad. He disbelieved the angel, Gabriel, when he joyously informed him in the Holy Place of the temple that he and his wife would have the prophesied messianic forerunner in their old age. His unbelief met with instant divine discipline in the form of deaf/muteness until the birth of the boy, who was none other than John the Baptist. For nine long months he

couldn't hear anything nor say anything about anything. Imagine the severity of this. He had just encountered one of God's most choice angels after four hundred years of prophetic silence, coupled with the most off-the-charts messianic news, and he couldn't say ANYTHING about it.

As we know, when the family feuded over the name of the child on his circumcision day, the moment the aged priest, Zacharias, wrote that his name would be JOHN on a tablet (probably purchased from their version of Staples), God loosed his tongue and opened his ears. All of a sudden, the unbelief in God's prophetic provision which had obstructed the flow of worship and praise out of his mouth, now burst forth like a mighty torrent before all present and before the throne of God. Don't you know that ol' Gabriel had a big grin on his angelic face? Dr. Luke records the lyrics of the praise song in Luke 1:57-80. Here we encounter ...

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

Maybe his story is your story this Christmas. Your own sin, be what it may, has obstructed your ability and desire to praise God for His work over the centuries to bring the Messiah, Jesus, to earth to be our Savior. The Spirit of God, however, has placed his loving finger on that sin and you know exactly what it is, and you see so clearly how it is obstructing the flow of praise out of your mouth during this holy, sacred season.

You know what you need to do. You to do what Zacharias did. You need to confess your sin, choosing to seek God's forgiveness and mercy. The moment you come clean, the moment your unrighteousness is replaced, by divine power, by God's righteousness, you will not only feel clean and pure, but the gate holding back your praise to God will be opened and out of your heart and mouth will come specific words, based on specific biblical texts and truths, praising God for sending the Jesus to be your redeemer and your point of inexorable, unfathomable hope.

Episode #4 gives us a high definition video of what happened when Zacharias moved from unbelief to belief. It all started, as we've seen, with a nasty family feud over the proposed name of the prophetic son.

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

*The Problem (Luke 1:57-63).* Friends and relatives couldn't believe Elizabeth, the new mother dared to think of going against culture and name her son, John. Her lineage had no such name in it. As I've said, once Zacharias wrote on the tablet the boy's name would, in fact, be John, not only did all argumentation cease, but praise to God's redemptive program poured out of his mouth.

*The Praise (Luke 1:64-80).* This praise focused on two areas:

First, *Zacharias gave loud praise to the Master, God, for bringing the Messiah (Luke 1:68-75).* All throughout his praise, one can't help but sense the hope the imminent appearance of the Messiah gave to the old priest. That hope, of course, was purposefully and thoughtfully wedded to two areas: divine *redemption* and divine *remembrance*, and both of these, in turn, were proof-

texted with Old Testament divinely inspired texts. Put differently, the hope Zacharias saw in the coming work of the Messiah moved him to praise, and all this praise was built upon exact and ancient teachings of God. I'll note these as we move through the verses, but for our purposes at this juncture I must simply ask: When God removes the obstruction holding back your praise for His redemptive work in sending Jesus to earth, what Bible texts will serve as the basis of your praise? God loves to hear that you know what He has promised those who love Him.

Zacharias praised God for actually moving in history to give us the Messiah, the One who would finally secure spiritual and eternal forgiveness and redemption for sinners. His praise, in this regard, gushes forth in verse 69 through 71.

<sup>69</sup> And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant—

<sup>70</sup> As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old— <sup>71</sup> Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US ...

Once again, please note how Zacharias employed the past tense here (viz., “raised up”), even though Christ had not been born yet. What unshakeable, unflinching faith! His thinking was most logical. Since his faith in God’s angelic word assured him that his son, John, would be the messianic forerunner, then the Davidic Messiah *was coming*. Additionally, since He *was coming* by divine design, NOTHING COULD STOP, THWART, or HALT His arrival and the accomplishment of His redemptive mission. He substantiates his theology of praise by quoting passages like Psalm 18:2 and 132:17 which liken God’s salvation to the power resident in the horn of a massive, muscular horned animal.

While in South Carolina one year visiting my father’s ten sisters, along with countless other relatives, we took our children to my Uncle Walter’s large ranch to pick some watermelons and to see a Brahma bull. Sitting in the back of his old, rusty Chevy work truck in the middle of a large field, the ground thundered as the bull ran toward us. Pulling up alongside us like we were some kind of unwanted opponent, he jerked his head with those ominous looking horns from side to side as he grunted and snorted at us. Believe me, nobody wanted to get out of the truck and pet the nice bull. We didn’t even want to stick a hand outside the confines of the truck bed. Why? We collectively and instantly respected his horned power.

Such is the nature of the power the Messiah brought to the world to deal with sin, Satan, and to secure salvation for sinners. His power, as evidenced on the cross and the empty tomb, would accomplish unbelievable things:

- It would give spiritual sight to blind eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)
- It would free you from slavery to sin (Romans 6:19ff)
- It would make the repentant sinner into a new spiritual person (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- It would move slaves of sin to become sons of God (Galatians 4:1-20)
- It abolished spiritual death and replaced it with spiritual and eternal life (2 Timothy 1:10)
- It would have the ability to keep you saved once you were saved (Romans 8:30; John 10:28-30; Hebrews 7:24-25)

- It would bring Satan's kingdom and dominion over this old earth to its end (Luke 10:18; Ephesians 2:1-3; Revelation 20:1-10)
- It would break Satan's power as the purveyor of death (Hebrews 2:14)
- It would, well, I'm sure you can think of many other things God's powerful salvation has secured for Christ-followers.

The point of Zacharias is well-taken: The Messiah's power to save sinners would be unstoppable; therefore, God had to be praised ... and should be praised. When's the last time you praised Him for bringing that power to bear on your formerly sin-shackled, sin-stained, death-ridden life? Christmas is a good time to start that kind of praise because that's with the Messianic power arrived.

Zacharias didn't just praise God for the supernatural salvific power the Messiah would have, He praised God for lovingly fulfilling His prophetic Word "to us," that is to Israel.

<sup>69</sup> And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant—  
<sup>70</sup> As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old— <sup>71</sup> Salvation FROM  
OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US ...

It is well-known that God prophetically promised Israel, His chosen people (Deuteronomy 7), that messianic salvation would come not just through them, nationally, but more specifically and precisely through the kingly line of David. Many ancient inspired texts support this conclusion (Isaiah 9:6-7; Amos 9:11; Zephaniah 3:15; Haggai 2:19; Micah 7:20). One prophetic text from the pen of Jeremiah is most illuminating:

<sup>1</sup> "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD. <sup>2</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: "You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 23).

Here God castigates the false shepherds who have historically ravaged His flock, Israel. Instead of feeding the flock, they've fed off the flock, taking advantage of and scattering them. God promised judgment on them, and judgment came when Babylon invaded their land.

God, then, turned and offered these prophetic words of messianic hope through the royal line of David:

<sup>3</sup> "Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. <sup>4</sup> "I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.

Whereas the scattering had been literal, the divine re-gathering would be literal, drawing the Israelites not just from Assyria and Babylon but from "all the countries." God, then, promised to

place faithful shepherds over Israel at this time when Israel would know true, lasting peace. Obviously, we await the fulfillment of these prophetic kingdom words.

God developed His prophetic promise further some six hundred years before the birth of the Messiah:

<sup>5</sup> “Behold, *the days are coming*,” declares the LORD, “When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>6</sup> “In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, ‘The LORD our righteousness.’ <sup>7</sup> “Therefore behold, *the days are coming*,” declares the LORD, “when they will no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ <sup>8</sup> but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from *the north land* and from all the countries where I had driven them.’ Then they will live on their own soil” (Jeremiah 23).

Concerning these exciting prophetic words, we can do no better than listen to the late Dr. Charles Feinberg, former Dean Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Semitics and Old Testament at Talbot Theological Seminary, and a converted Jew:

After Jeremiah has denounced the faithless shepherds of the nation and has predicted the coming of good shepherds, he describes as a climax the incomparable rule of the King Messiah, the ‘Branch.’ This designation has much in common semantically with ‘seed’ (Gen 3:15), the Davidic ‘son’ (2 Sam 7), and the ‘servant of the LORD’ (Isa 42-53). In each case there is a general reference to a number of individuals; but by a process of strict selection and narrowing down, the seed, the son, and the servant ultimately find highest fulfillment in the Lord Jesus the Messiah, ‘the Seed of the Woman,’ ‘the Son of David,’ and ‘the Servant of the LORD.’ The Lord was thus superintending the historical process in such a way that his ultimate choice unmistakably was Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>1</sup>

This Davidic King/Messiah would eventually rule over a reunited and saved nation, one which would, in turn, bless the world. Yes. It is just as Zacharias said in his song of praise to God. *God should be praised for actually bringing the royal Davidic messianic deliverer to mankind just as He said He would in numerous prophetic contexts.* One of those contexts, as we encounter in Luke 1:71 is from Psalm 106:10 which recounts God’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage; however, as Zacharias shows us, this ancient text also pointed prophetically forward to the work of the Messiah. He, and He alone, would deal with Israel’s enemies in due time and bring in the peace prophesied when His kingdom would be established (cf. Isaiah 9:6-7). Again, we await the complete fulfillment of these wise, hope-filled words (Revelation 19). But we also relish in the awesome truth that the Davidic Messiah came to first be our spiritual deliverer before He consummates the kingdom. He was from the line of David, clearly (Matthew 1:1, 20; 9:27; Luke 1:27). The angel also validated this truth to Mary:

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<sup>1</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982): 162.

<sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father **David**; <sup>33</sup> and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1).

No wonder Zacharias burst forth with words of praise to God. God had, in fact, brought redemption to mankind through the Davidic line and through the divine Davidic One who could actually secure this salvation. If that isn't praiseworthy, what is? God controlled all the complex, ever-changing geo-political, social, hereditary, military, ethnic variables so the Jewish Messiah could be born for the purpose of securing redemption and a kingdom for me and for you. Amazing. No, make that praiseworthy.

Zacharias didn't just praise God for bringing the Messiah to be our redeemer; he turned to also *praise God for bringing the Messiah based on His remembrance*. Remembrance of what? Remembrance of the old Abrahamic Covenant He had made and promised to Israel unconditionally, a covenant which would eventually bless the entire world through the Jews. Here's how the old priest put this perfect praise:

<sup>72</sup> To show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, <sup>74</sup> To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, <sup>75</sup> In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

Once more, the words of praise are intrinsically wedded to Old Testament texts:

- “to show mercy toward our fathers” is from Psalm 25:6; 98:3; 136.
- “and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father” is from Genesis 12:2, 3; 17:7; 22:15-18; Exodus 2;24; 2 Samuel 22:51; Psalm 105:6-10; Micah 7:20.
- “to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear” is from Exodus 19:6 and Jeremiah 30:9-10.

His praise is tied to these texts he knew because God remembered them and fulfilled them in the bringing of the Messiah.

Did you get that? Despite the fact that 2,000 years had transpired, despite the fact a lot of things, some good and some bad, some righteous and some unrighteous had happened in all those years regarding God's chosen people, God did not ... and could not ... forget them nor the promise He made unconditionally to bless them as a people and the world (Isaiah 49:1-16), or Gentiles, in and through them (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18). God's redemptive/kingdom program was right on track ... and it still is. And because He is a God who remembers His words and promises (Psalm 89:3-4; 105:8-10), we can, and should praise Him, for even though the world seems to be spinning out of control today, God's redemptive/kingdom program won't be thwarted. He will save those who turn to Him in believing faith! He will

come in clouds to establish His kingdom in due time! So, praise the God who remembers in an active, not a passive, shoulder shrugging nature. Let your praise be like that of Zacharias, too, something akin to a beautiful, flowing song.

In addition to praising God for bringing the Messiah, Zachariah offered more focused and appropriate praise.

Second, *Zacharias gave loud praise to the Master, God, for bringing the Messenger*, John (Luke 1:76-79). His words of praise drip with tender, fatherly love, and they are, once more, bathed in Scripture:

<sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; <sup>77</sup> To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins ...

Hold it right there, please. The statement here is most emphatic, as we can see by the placement of the coordinating conjunction, and (καὶ). Zacharias didn't say his son would be a good field hockey player, or a famous baseball player, or an astute student in academia in Jerusalem, or a successful business owner of some coastal Israelite town. Quite the contrary, he focused on who his son would represent and what he'd accomplish in his lifetime. These are the things he praised God for.

He praised God for letting his child<sup>2</sup> be the prophet of the Most High, a name denoting God as the Supreme Ruler of things seen and unseen (Psalm 97:9). Interestingly enough, it is this role that Satan aspired to prior to his inglorious, fatal fall from grace (Isaiah 14:14). This is also a name used quite profusely in Daniel as God disclosed that He would be the One who

<sup>2</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature*: 749. **αιδιον, ου, το** (Hdt., Aristoph.+ ) dim. of παις (Reader, Polemo 274, w. ref. to Hippocr., Sept. 5 and Philo, Op. 105: a very young child 'up to seven years'; B-D-F §111, 3; Mlt.-H. 345).

① a child, normally below the age of puberty, *child*

ⓐ *very young child, infant*, used of boys and girls. Of a newborn child (Diod S 4, 20, 3; Just., D. 34, 2 al. [after Mt 2:8f]; Tat. 33, 3) Lk 2:21 v.l. (eight days old, as Gen 17:12); J 16:21. Infants are fed honey, then milk B 6:17 (cp. Diod S 5, 70, 3 αυται [αι Νύμφαι] δε μέλι και γάλα μίσγουσαι το παιδιον [τον Δία] εθρεψαν.—HUsener [at γάλα b]). Those who are born again have ως παιδιων την ψυχην *a soul like that of newborn children* B 6:11.—Mt 2:8, 9, 11, 13f, 20f; Lk 1:59, 66, 76, 80; 2:17, 27, 40; Hb 11:23 (cp. Ex 2:2f). GJs 20:3f; 21:3; 22:1 v.l. (for βρέφος); 22:2 v.l. (for παις).

ⓑ w. ref. to age (ApcEsd 4:33, 35 p. 29, 9 and 12 Tdf. παιδιον ... γέρων): Mt 18:2, 4f; Mk 9:36f; 10:15; Lk 9:47f; 18:17; 1 Cl 16:3 (Is 53:2). Pl. Mt 11:16; 19:13f; Mk 7:28; 10:13f; Lk 7:32; 18:16 (on Mk 10:14, 15 and parallels s. JBlinzler, Klerusblatt '44, 90–96). γυναίκες και παιδια (Num 14:3; Jdth 7:23; 4 Macc 4:9; cp. Jos., Bell. 4, 115) Mt 14:21; 15:38. παιδια ... πατέρες ... νεανίσκοι IJ 2:14.—B 8:1ab. Of girls Mk 5:39–41; 7:30.

ⓒ w. ref. to relationship; the father is indicated by a gen. (μου as TestJob 39:12; cp. Epict. 4, 1, 141 σου; TestJob 4:5) J 4:49. Pl. Lk 11:7. The child indicated by a gen., w. the father ο πατηρ του παιδιου Mk 9:24.

② one who is open to instruction, *child*, fig. ext. of 1 παιδια ταῖς φρεσίν *children as far as the mind is concerned* 1 Cor 14:20.—W. ref. to their attitude toward the truth (Artem. 2, 69 p. 162, 7: τα παιδια ἀληθη λέγει οὐδέπω γὰρ οἶδε ψεύδεσθαι και ἐξαπατᾶν) Mt 18:3.

③ one who is treasured in the way a parent treasures a child, *child*, fig. ext. of 1

ⓐ of the children of God Hb 2:13f (vs. 13 after Is 8:18, but understood in a NT sense).

ⓑ as a form of familiar address on the part of a respected pers., who feels himself on terms of fatherly intimacy w. those whom he addresses (Cornutus 1 p. 1, 1 ὦ π.; Athen. 13, 47, 584c) IJ 2:18; 3:7 v.l. Used by the risen Christ in addressing his disciples J 21:5.—B. 92. M-M. TW.<sup>2</sup>

would fulfill His kingdom plan (Daniel 3:26; 4:2, 17, 24, 25, 32, 34; 5:18, 21; 7:25). All of this makes me smile because I'm sure Zacharias threw this in for the sake of Gabriel, the angel who God used all through the book of Daniel to speak to Israel about the coming Divine One who would rule and reign over earth from the throne of David. Surely, he must have been listening ... and smiling himself! Why would he be smiling? He got to watch a saint move from unsettled unbelief to firm belief.

Empowered by the Most High God, the supreme power in the cosmos, John the Baptist would in his lifetime be unstoppable in fulfilling God's redemptive/kingdom program. John would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. The multiple infinitives give us the information/purpose as to how he would go about preparing the ground for the Messiah's arrival.

Infinitive number one appears in the first two words: "To give" (τοῦ δοῦναι) to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:77). John did this part of his prophetic job well. Like Elijah, he called the people to task and spoke openly, candidly, and courageously about their sin so they could be saved. This, of course, paved the way for the Messiah who would, in fact, be the point of all salvation and redemption for sinners (Matthew 1:21; 26:28; Acts 10:43). John's words in Luke 3 reveal just how passionately he prepped hearts for Christ:

<sup>4</sup> as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. <sup>5</sup> EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE 'BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH; <sup>6</sup> AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.' <sup>7</sup> So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'we have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup> "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Like a sharp plough blade, John's pointed, truthful words dug into the hardened soil of the hearts of fellow Israelites, leaving them with a decision to repent or suffer the eternal consequences. To hear him was to be accosted, verbally. To hear him was to have your thinking challenged, your well-ordered religious world rocked, your life of leisure challenged, your worldview hammered by spiritual truth, and your secret sin left exposed before the fiery eyes of a holy God. Like a lumberjack in the forest with a sharp axe, John left you with no doubt that your tree either produced spiritual fruit from a life given to God, or it would be felled in due time for not doing what it was designed to by God. To hear him speak was to sense not just the wrath of God against sin, but to also pick up the deep, abiding mercy God has for us ... as Zacharias pointed out in Luke 1:78. Mercy for sinners. Now, there is something to praise God for and it is something John knew how to preach about.

Believe me; you can do no better this Christmas than to join with Zacharias who praised God for sending the messenger, John. Why? His message prepared the way for the Lord to speak, teach, and ultimately go to the cross for each of us. More personally, you just might need

to praise God for the messenger he sent to your life years ago, you know, the one who spoke like John the Baptist to you, the one who got your spiritual attention, the one who made you spiritually uncomfortable, and the one who finally showed you the way of forgiveness and salvation through faith in Jesus, the Christ.

The second and third infinitives, “to shine” and “to guide” in verse 79 reveal that John would point to Jesus who would be THE source of spiritual light and guidance toward true inner peace.

<sup>78</sup> Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, <sup>79</sup> TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Quoting here from Malachi 4:2, Zacharias praised God for permitting his son to be the one who would initially point to the Messiah who would bring spiritual light to those sitting in spiritual darkness. The graphic picture is of people sitting helplessly in darkness, like the deep, foreboding darkness of the woods, and then the sun suddenly breaks on the distant horizon giving them guidance to find their way home. What a picture of salvation. John went on to make his father proud as we read in John 1 as a purveyor of Christ as the Light:

<sup>4</sup> In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. <sup>5</sup> The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. <sup>6</sup> There <sup>1</sup>came a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. <sup>9</sup> There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him (John 1).

Jesus didn't let us down as the light, did He? Not only did He call himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12), He showed Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration that He possessed the Shekinah glory of God Almighty (Mark 9:2-3). Truly, to know this Christ, by faith, is to move from spiritual darkness to spiritual life for the rest of eternity. And to know spiritual life in Christ is, by definition, to also know true, lasting inner peace (Acts 10:36; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14-17; Colossian 1:20).

John did his job well, didn't he? Just like his father prophesied with a heavy dose of praise, his son would be the prophet who would point this Light of all spiritual lights and this Guide of all spiritual guides. Knowing, by faith, his beloved son would do all this; he just couldn't help but be moved by praise to God.

Here's a challenge for Christmas. Why not step into the sandals of Zacharias, a nobody who introduced Somebody, and give God precise biblical praise for sending the Messiah, Jesus and the messenger, John? Why not put aside asking for things for yourself and just let the praise flow out of your mouth for how God used insignificant, obscure folks to bless us with the Savior?

And if you feel your praise is obstructed somehow, I think you know what you need to do. It's time to have a little talk with Jesus.

And while you're giving praise, why not utter a prayer or two for you and your family. Pray specifically that your children, your grandchildren, or the children of family and/or friends would become John the Baptist to our godless generation.

And if Jesus, the Christ, isn't your horn of salvation, if you don't know of His forgiveness, if you are living in the shadow of spiritual death, if you are lost in spiritual darkness, and if you don't know inner peace, then make this Christmas, you do what John did. Make this the Christmas you, by faith, chose to follow Jesus, the Christ and the Savior of the world.