12/5/2021

Dear Students,

God's love and kindness will shine upon us like the sun that rises in the sky. On us who live in the dark shadow of death this light will shine to guide us into a life of peace. (Luke 1:79-80)

Before Jesus was born, it had been hundreds of years since God had spoken directly through prophets to his people. They had the Old Testament to study, but a lot of people drifted away from having a relationship with God, to just studying and obeying God, like a powerful ruler or teacher you respect but don't really know. That's better than rejecting God, but it's not enough. And God never stays out of his own story for very long!

Luke 1:5-17

5 When Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest by the name of Zechariah. His wife Elizabeth was from the family of Aaron. **6** Both of them were good people and pleased the Lord God by obeying all that he had commanded. **7** But they did not have children. Elizabeth could not have any, and both Zechariah and Elizabeth were already old.



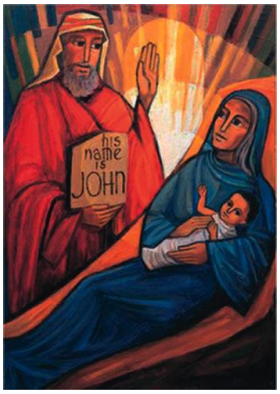
8 One day Zechariah's group of priests were on duty, and he was serving God as a priest. **9** According to the custom of the priests, he had been chosen to go into the Lord's temple that day and to burn incense, **10** while the people stood outside praying.

11 All at once an angel from the Lord appeared to Zechariah at the right side of the altar. **12** Zechariah was confused and afraid when he saw the angel. **13** But the angel told him: "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayers. Your wife Elizabeth will have a son, and you must name him John. **14** His birth will make you very happy, and many people will be glad. **15** Your son will be a great servant of the Lord. He must never drink wine or beer, and the power of the Holy Spirit will be with him from the time he is born.

16 "John will lead many people in Israel to turn back to the Lord their God. **17** Because of John, parents will be more thoughtful of their children. And people who now disobey God will begin to think as they ought to. That is how John will get people ready for the Lord."

- What does this passage say about the kind of relationship God wants to have with you? What kind of relationships does he want us to have with each other?

Luke 1:57-80



57 When Elizabeth's son was born, **58** her neighbors and relatives
heard how kind the Lord had been to her, and they too were glad.
59 They were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. **60** But
Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John." **61** The people argued, "No
one in your family has ever been named John." **62** So they
motioned to Zechariah to find out what he wanted to name his son.

63 Zechariah asked for a writing tablet. Then he wrote, "His name
is John." Everyone was amazed. **64** Right away, Zechariah started
speaking and praising God. **67** The Holy Spirit came upon
Zechariah, and he began to speak:



68 "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come to save his
people. **70** Long ago the Lord promised by the words of his holy
prophets **71** to save us from our enemies and from everyone who
hates us. **72** God said he would be kind to our people and keep
his sacred promise. **74** Then we could serve him without fear, **75**
by being holy and good as long as we live."

76 "You, my son, will be called a prophet of God in heaven above.
You will go ahead of the Lord to get everything ready for him. **77**
You will tell his people that they can be saved when their sins are
forgiven. **78** God's love and kindness will shine upon us like the
sun that rises in the sky. **79** On us who live in the dark shadow of
death this light will shine to guide us into a life of peace." **80** As John grew up, God's
Spirit gave him great power. John lived in the desert until the time he was sent to the
people of Israel.

- What are some ways that you or people around you live "in the dark shadow of death"? (Covid? Climate worries? Political trouble? Not to mention our own sinful thoughts or wants, or our own mortality!)
- Do you want a life of peace? How can Jesus coming give you peace?
- Zechariah and Elizabeth and John were partners with God, helping to bring God's light into the world. How is being a partner with Jesus different from only studying Jesus?
- What are some ways you can partner with Jesus?

In his letter to the Christians living in Philippi, the apostle Paul wrote:

Philippians 1:4-5,9-11

4 Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, **5** for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.**9** I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. **10** For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. **11** May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

- What is Paul's prayer request for his partners?

Look at verse 9 again: "I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding."

- What would happen if someone prayed that prayer for you? Or if you prayed that prayer for your friends?
- If each of us had love overflowing more and more, how could that lighten the darkness?
- What would get better if you could grow in knowledge and understanding? How would more knowledge and understanding lighten the darkness?

We don't usually think of Christmas as a "knowledge and understanding" holiday! More of a food and presents holiday. But that's what the image of light at Christmas is about. Look at verses 79 and 80 again: "God's love and kindness will shine upon us like the sun that rises in the sky. On us who live in the dark shadow of death this light will shine to guide us into a life of peace."

God made Christmas because He loves you. God sent Jesus so that you can have more knowledge, more peace, more light, more love, and more hope.

Your challenge this week is to think of someone you know, a friend or family member, and **pray for them to have love overflow more and more, and that they would grow in knowledge and understanding of Jesus**. You can pray it for yourself too!

Close in Prayer: *"Dear Jesus, you are the light shining in the darkness. Please give me more love, more knowledge, and more understanding of you. Thank you for coming to save me. Amen."*

In Christ, Sharon Rauenzahn (sharon@shroop.net)