

enJOY Christmas By Celebrating Salvation

Luke 1:5-2:20

We Can Enjoy Christmas ...

By Remembering That ...

God _____ Us ...
From _____ (1:68)

God _____ Us ...
From Our _____ (1:69-75)

God _____ Us ...
To _____ (1:76-79)

So We Can _____ ...
By Adoring Jesus

Step Four

Zechariah's prophecy that we are studying this week (68-79) is a song. Imagine the passion he would have had as he sang. He had been mute for nine months – and was now singing about such significant truths regarding his own son and the coming Son of God. Songs continue to be powerful media that help us carry important messages. Even today people who have never experienced the power of Jesus often like Christmas carols. Last year our extended family had a great sing-along with three generations around a piano – even though none of us are especially talented musically or vocally -- and not all of us are Christians. Many of our best-known Christmas carols do a great job pointing to the essence of Christmas. Zechariah is not described as a great singer – but he did have a great message and he shared it. So praise God for the gift of music today. Ask Him to help you use part of our rich collection of Christmas carols to celebrate the essence of Christmas.

Step Five

Read Luke 1:76-77. Here Zechariah is describing what his own son John will do. He will be a prophet of God, preparing the way for Jesus, helping people to acquire forgiveness and salvation from God. For years Zechariah had been a priest. He had faithfully spoken to his people for God, and spoken to God for his people. Imagine how he would have felt to announce that his own son would soon open the way for God incarnate, Emmanuel, God-with-us. It was an indescribable privilege. Today we each share a bit of John's calling. Filled with the Holy Spirit, we are all called to prepare the way for God's work in other people's lives. Through our attitudes and actions each of us can play a small part in helping people acquire forgiveness and salvation from the Lord Jesus. At times the people around you may seem interested in anything but God, but at Christmas things may be different. Would you pray for one person near you today who doesn't know Jesus? Ask God to use you to 'prepare the way' for His work in that person's life. As attention turns to Christmas, praise God that He can use each of us to help others find Christ.

Assembly Instructions for an Essential Christmas

If you are like me, you first experienced Christmas as an end-of-the-year, half-trillion dollar celebration complete with tree, tinsel and time-off -- before you experienced the saving and transforming love of Jesus. To say it differently, most of us received a Christmas gift, before we received The Christmas Gift: Jesus. That sets up a tension in our lives. It is a tension between Christmas-extras – which can be fun! – and Christmas-essence, the good news that Jesus can save you and me. Part of following Jesus today means pushing past the non-essential extras into the essence of Christmas. It is not easy, but it can save us some stress during the hustle and bustle of Christmas. It can move us past fleeting happiness to abiding joy. And most importantly, it can help us get more of Jesus into our lives. Let's return to our scripture and see how Zechariah celebrated the essence of Christmas as he approached the very first one. Then let's reflect together on some steps to assemble an essential Christmas celebration for ourselves and our families. The only tools you need are the Word of God, the Spirit of God and a willing heart. So let's get started!

Step One

Read Luke 1:57, 67-68. Just think about what Zechariah has experienced. God was resting on this man, big time. After passing through the age when many would have had a child, he finally becomes a brand new dad (57). Like other Jewish people he would have considered this child a gift from the Lord (Ps. 127:3). A prominent priest, Zechariah had been silent for nine months (20, 64). (Imagine the strain that would be on us preacher-types!) Suddenly now, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit. He announces that God will redeem his people, which is “to set free by paying a price.” At the time Israel was occupied by the Romans – and Israel wanted political liberation! Yet the Prince of Peace that Zechariah announces would bring liberation to outlast every political order. If you are like me, although you love God, you notice that your heart is prone to wander. Although we are blessed with political liberty, our own prosperity can provide many snares for our souls. From time to time our affections can focus on things that are less than God, and sometimes on things that are even contrary to God. To celebrate the Lordship of Jesus in your life today, list in your mind the petty temptations and passing enticements from which Jesus has saved you. Thank him for his strength and patience to save you from being enslaved to these earthly things. Enjoy your freedom to live for God today!

Step Two

Read Luke 1:69-75. Zechariah is a priest. He is accustomed to helping people remember God – and that is just what he does, saying “As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old ... to show the mercy promised to our fathers ...” (70, 72). Zechariah knew that Israel had had its share of enemies, and that God had protected Israel over the years. Even when they sinned as a nation, God rescued Israel (Jeremiah 29:11). God rescues us today as well. As we lean forward into a fallen world, our own faith can become battered and worn. Yet God has provided us a rich treasure from the past to renew our faith and keep it burning bright far into the future, namely, Scripture. For an essential Christmas celebration plan ahead to read the Christmas story to those close to you on Christmas Eve or Christmas day (Mt. 1:18-25 or Luke 2:1-21). If you'll be away from home, ask your host if you can read a story from the Bible about the first Christmas. Ask your family and friends how they might have felt were they in Joseph or Mary's shoes. Ask them how much of this story depended on people – and how much of it depended on God. Praise God for the provision of Scripture in our lives – and his sovereign moving in human affairs. May God's Word renew and strengthen your heart this Christmas!

Step Three

Can you imagine life in Zechariah and Elizabeth's home leading up to the first Christmas? Well past the typical child-bearing years, Elizabeth is pregnant. Her husband Zechariah cannot speak. Their young relative Mary is mysteriously pregnant -- and has come to visit -- for three months! Elizabeth gives birth, the baby is named John and suddenly Zechariah can speak. Throughout the area, people knew that God was up to something special (65-66). At Christmas time we often get together with members of our extended family. To be honest, sometimes the reality of visiting with our extended families doesn't live up to the ideal experience we have in mind. One of the lessons I find in our passage is that Zechariah and Elizabeth were trying to figure out and to follow what God was doing in their lives. They probably hadn't asked for all these surprises, but they embraced them. And God ended up using them and their family to usher in Jesus' ministry. How can you pray today for the members of your extended family that you will be seeing this Christmas? Where there is strain, ask God to help you see what he is doing. Ask him to help you discern and cooperate with his work in those you love this Christmas.