

## THE SONGS WE SING: Celebrating the Chorus of Christmas

### "THE BENEDICTUS"

#### LUKE 1:67-80

### This Week's Core Competency

**Hope** – I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus. Hebrews 6:19, 20 *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.*

The first candle lit during Advent, called the prophecy candle, represents the hope of Jesus' coming. The second, called the Bethlehem candle, represents the peace that Christ brings to the world and to us. The third, called the Shepherds candle, in some traditions the pink one, represents joy in anticipation of the birth of Jesus. "It marks a shift from the more solemn tone of the first two Sundays of Advent that focus on Preparation and Hope, to a more joyous atmosphere of anticipation and expectancy . . . Whatever sequence is adopted for these Sundays, the theme of Joy can still be the focus for the pink candle. For example, when using the third Sunday to commemorate the visit of the Magi the focus can be on the Joy of worshipping the new found King. Or the Shepherds as the symbol for the third Sunday brings to mind the joy of the proclamation made to them in the fields, and the

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***Hope generates energy, enthusiasm and excitement; lack of hope breeds only apathy and inertia.***

**-J. I. Packer**

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adoration expressed as they knelt before the Child at the manger. If used on the fourth Sunday of Advent, it can symbolize the Joy in fulfilled hope" (Dennis Bratcher, "The Season of Advent," [article on-line] accessed 1 Dec 2009; available from <http://www.crivoice.org/cyadvent.html>; Internet). As Advent progresses we are reminded that Jesus is our hope, our peace, and our joy.

These three virtues—hope, peace and joy—are obviously related. Take hope and joy for example. Joy feeds on hope, and starves without it. Mathematically speaking, hope and joy are corollaries; they naturally accompany one another. They're also covariant; they increase and decrease together. So an increase in hope results in a proportional increase in joy and vice versa. At no time is this more evident than when someone we love is seriously ill. We hear that a close friend has been hospitalized with cancer and are devastated, but we're not without hope because our hope is set on Christ (2Co 1:10). What's more, as long as we have hope, we can cope with the hardships of life and even with death. Hope is potent; it enables us to rejoice in the face of trouble knowing that we're better off once our faith is tested (Jas 1:2).

It's after we hear of our friend's illness that the rollercoaster ride begins. With every bit of bad news, every setback, every failed treatment and complication, hope wanes and so does joy. We pray; we hope; we wait. We fear time is running out. Days of waiting stretch into weeks, good news is followed by bad, not-so-bad, then good, our joy tracks with our hope, waxing then waning

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with every piece of good then bad news. We know God's people are praying. Finally, we hear our loved one's tumors are shrinking and some have disappeared altogether. He has tons more energy, and the ugly, near black skin in the area of those tumors is returning to normal. Hope soars and so does joy.

The relationship of hope and joy is evident in Zachariah's Song sometimes called the Benedictus (Lk 1:67-80). As the hope of Israel's redemption welled up inside him, bursting with joy, John's father exclaimed, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel because he has come and has redeemed his people" (v. 68). The promise God had made long ago through his holy prophets had been kept in Mary's child. God had raised up a strong Savior in David's house, and his own child, John, would prepare the way for him. So if your joy gauge is sitting on empty, open your mind and heart to the hope you have in Christ made manifest at Advent.

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Luke 1:67-80

67His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come and has redeemed his  
people.

69He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David

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

71salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us-

72to show mercy to our fathers

and to remember his holy covenant,

73the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

74to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,

and to enable us to serve him without fear

75in holiness and righteousness before him all our  
days.

76And 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,

77to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,

78because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from  
heaven

79to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace."

80And the child grew and became strong in spirit;  
and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to  
Israel.

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Highlight prose vv. 67, 80.
- \* Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 68.
- \* Circle "has come" in v. 68.
- \* Circle "horn" in v. 69.
- \* Circle "salvation" in vv. 69, 71, 77.
- \* Circle "house" in v. 69.
- \* Box "as" indicating *comparison* in v. 70.
- \* Box "to" indicating *purpose* in vv. 72, 74.
- \* In the margin next to v. 73 write, "Cf., Ge 12:1-3."
- \* In the margin next to v. 76 write, "Cf., 3:4-6."
- \* Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 78.
- \* Circle "rising sun" in v. 78.

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## day 2

## EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Verse 67 is like verse 80, and both are different from verses 68-79. How so?
2. Explain the relationship of verse 68 to verses 69-75.
3. Put what verse 69 means in your own words. (See note on v. 69; cf. 2 Sam. 7:11)
4. According to verses 72-75 God "raised up a horn of salvation for us" (v. 69) for four purposes. List them. (Remember "to" indicates *purpose*)
5. Which do you consider God's ultimate purpose for us? (Cf. 1Th 1:9; Heb 9:14; Rev 1:6)
6. Zechariah's words indicate that God has provided salvation for Israel, for the Jewish people (cf. "Israel" v. 68; "us" vv. 69, 71, 74; and "our" vv. 71, 72, 73, 74, 75). How do we know that this salvation is for Gentiles as well? (See v. 72, 73, 79; cf. Gen. 12:3).
7. You're Zechariah announcing the part your son, John, will play in God's plan of salvation. Describe your emotions.
8. What was the purpose of John's ministry?
9. Explain why people receive "the knowledge of salvation *through* the forgiveness of their sins."
10. **Discussion:** If "the rising sun" refers to Christ, talk about the point of the rich imagery in verses 78 and 79. (Cf., Jn 1:6-9)

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## day 3

### **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The Benedictus is Zechariah's psalm of praise to God sung on the day his son, John, was circumcised. It's actually a prophecy as well, one that predicts the future fortunes of two children, the newborn son of Elizabeth and the yet to-be-born son of Mary. To appreciate Zechariah's song you might need to be reminded of the remarkable events that led up to it. First, Luke tells us that "Zechariah and Elizabeth were both upright in the sight of the Lord, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years" (Lk 1:6, 7). He begins by contradicting our expectations. They were righteous, but they were childless. How odd! And then he adds a note of desperation. Their biological clocks weren't running out; they had run out. Too bad!

Second, Luke surprises us with what an angel of the Lord said to Zechariah, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord" (13-15). And again he contradicts our expectations. Zechariah should have been ecstatic, but instead he was pensive, hesitant. He knew where babies came from and doubted one would come from an old man and a woman well along in years. So the angel gave him a sign, "You will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens because you did not believe my words" (v. 20). Clearly Zechariah's unbelief had stolen his hope, left him speechless, and without joy.

Finally, Luke reveals how the angel's words came true. On the eighth day after his son's birth, the time came to circumcise and name the boy. Friends and family expected him to be named Zechariah after his father, but his mother said, "No! He is to be called John" (v. 60). And when Zechariah was asked what he would like to name his son, to everyone's amazement he wrote, "His name is John" (v. 63). Immediately he could speak, and for the first time in nine months he did. And his first

words were the words of the Benedictus.

The Benedictus "can be divided into four parts: 1:67 (the narrative introduction); 1:68a (the opening statement of praise); 1:68b-79 (the hymn itself, which can be subdivided into 1:68b-75, 76-79); and 1:80 (the narrative conclusion)" (Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC, 96). Verses 68b-75 give the reason for Zechariah's praise. The Lord has once again visited his people to redeem them like he repeated did in the past. He has raised up a descendant of David who is strong enough to bring salvation to God's people and deliver them from their enemies so they might serve him without fear. He has done this because of the oath he swore to Abraham. "Zechariah speaks as a righteous Jew here. He longs for the nation's vindication, possibly from Rome and the forces that direct her. In Luke's story, however, the scope of the hymn's hope may even be broader. He will show how the Promised One from David's house has power that extends beyond the political forces that sit over Israel (8:22-56). God has 'raised up' (cf. Deut. 18:15, 18; Judg. 3:9, 15; 1 Sam. 2:35; 2 Sam. 23:1) this significant figure onto the world's stage. The Son of David (God's 'servant'; v. 69) will become a servant himself (cf. Phil. 2:7). He will take on the cosmic forces that oppress humanity and bring pain and suffering into the world. When liberation comes thought his ministry, sin and Satan will lead the enemy lines (Luke 4:16-30; 11:14-23). That is why when Zechariah turns to compare the career of his son John with the child to come, it is the spiritual issues of their ministry that dominate" (Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 76, 77).

Verses 76-79 describe John's role with respect to the Promised One. He will be a prophet who will prepare the way for the Promised One. He will give the Lord's people "the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins." In other words, through his ministry they will be redeemed from their enemies through receiving the forgiveness of sins messiah provides. That same forgiveness of sins will also come to the Gentiles, "those living in darkness and in the shadow of death" (v. 79).

### *The Message of the Passage*

*Praise God for he has come in the person of Christ to redeem Israel bringing salvation and forgiveness to his people and to the Gentiles.*

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day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**
  
- **Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.**
  
- **Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:**
  - o **Belonging**
  - o **Becoming**
  - o *going Beyond*
  
- **Journal your thoughts on the passage.**
  
  
- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)  
Celebrate Advent. Decide that you're going to follow the instructions for celebrating Advent with your family in your home group "family" instead.

**“The Benedictus”**

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

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# notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 68 **has come** Lit., "looked upon" or "visited" (Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 141; cf., ESV, NJB). "The key word in this verse is the verb 'to visit' (NIV: has come). In the LXX [the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT called the Septuagint] this word often occurs in reference to 'God's gracious visitation of his people' (Fitzmyer, p. 383). The following examples should make this idea clear: With reference to God's intention to deliver Israel from Egypt, Exod. 4:31 states in part: 'they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction' (RSV). In Ruth 1:6 the discouraged Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, 'for she heard . . . that the LORD had visited his people and given them food' (RSV). (See also the petitions found in Pss. 80:14; 106:4)" (Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, NIBC, 32).

v. 68 **redeemed** The past tense (*prophetic aorist*) refers to future events that are so certain that they are stated vividly as if they had already taken place. "The reference is undoubtedly to the saving work of God which has already begun with the birth of John and the conception of Messiah; but the content of the verbs indicates that Zechariah is looking forward to the redemption which is not yet accomplished but could be said to be 'as good as accomplished' now that the divine train of events has been set in motion" (I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC, 90).

v. 69 **horn of salvation** I.e., "a mighty Saviour" (91; cf., the NET Bible, **sn** 213 on Lk 1:69). "Horn" was used as a metaphor for might since it displayed the strength of an animal. Since John is not linked to the "house of David," the term refers to Christ rather than him. Messiah, before whom John will go (cf. vv. 76-79), is the strong one who brings salvation (Stein, 99).

v. 69 **house of** Zechariah's language echoes God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:11-13.

v. 70 **parentheses** The editors of the NIV take verse 70 as a parenthetical comment (probably of Luke) inserted into Zechariah's song (cf. NKJV, NRSV, TEV, the NET Bible, ESV which do not). The expression does reflect Luke's interest in fulfilled prophecy mentioned in 1:1.

v. 71 **salvation** "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)" (Stein, 99; cf. Evans, 32). Other commentators argue the term does pertain to political matters. "There follows a very loosely attached description of the salvation resulting from God's action, soterian [salvation] being in apposition to the content of vs. 68f. The language, drawn from Ps. 106:10 (105:10) (cf. 2 Sa. 22:18; Ps. 18:17 (17:18)), suggests political deliverance, which is of course not to be excluded from the Christian concept of salvation and formed part of contemporary Jewish hopes (1QM 14:4-10; 18:6-11; Ps. Sol. 17:23-27; Shemoneh Esreh, 7, 10, 12). But the language is formal, no particular enemies are specified, and the thought is of those "who now prevent us from serving God 'without fear'" (W. Foerster, TDNT, II, 813); political need and spiritual need are closely linked" (Marshall, 91, 92).

vv. 72, 73 **covenant, oath** The covenant referred to is the one he made with Abraham, swore to Isaac, and confirmed to Jacob (Ps 105:8-11; cf., Ge 12:1-3; 22:15-18; 26:3-5).

v. 76 **Most High** While "Most High" clearly refers to God (cf. 1:35), "Lord" and "him" likely refer to Jesus, the one whose way John prepared (cf. 3:4; 7:27).

v. 77 **knowledge of** Or simply "to give his people salvation." Information about salvation is not what Zechariah had in mind. "The knowledge described is not something imparted theoretically, but refers to the inward appropriation or experience of salvation as the result of a divine gift (1QS 11:15f.; cf. R. Bultmann, TDNT I, 706; J Gnilka, 234)" (93).

v. 78 **rising sun** Various translations, "the Sunrise from on high" NASB, "the dawn from on high" NRSV, "the Dayspring from on high" NKJV, "the bright dawn of salvation to rise" TEV. The Greek term can refer to the "rising" of a heavenly body hence the area of sunrise, "the east." It can also refer to the "growing" of a plant hence a "shoot" or "branch." "The imagery is thus that of the Davidic Messiah, the Shoot from Jesse (Is. 11:1ff.) and the star from Jacob (Nu. 24:17) who is to visit men from on high, i.e. from the dwelling place of God (2 Sa. 22:17; et al.) (Marshall, 95). "A likely allusion to Numbers 24:17 and Isaiah 11:1-10" (Bock, 77).

v. 79 **living in darkness** These words from Isaiah 9:1, 2 imply the blessing of Gentiles through Abraham since verse 1 contains the expression "Galilee of the Gentiles."



## What is Advent?

A time to Celebrate Christ's Birth and Look Forward to His Return.

Advent is the four week period leading up to Christmas. The word *advent* means arrival. When we celebrate Advent we focus on Jesus birth in the past and his return in the future. Traditionally, Advent is a very serious holiday; people pray and fast to make sure they are ready to meet Jesus when he comes. Each week of Advent becomes more joyful as Christ's birthday gets closer. Today, many Christians follow the tradition of lighting an Advent candle each week as a way to focus on Jesus' first and second coming.

### How to Celebrate Advent with My Family

#### Make you own Advent wreath or purchase one in The Connection Bookstore

The Advent Wreath is a circle of evergreen sprigs with four cangles around the circle and one candle in the middle. The candles around the circle are 3 purple and 1 pink. The one in the middle is white.

#### Pick a time to Light the Candle with your family

Once a week, Sunday is the traditional day, sit down with your family to light the candle for the week. Read the scripture, sing the song, and talk with your family about the meaning of the candle for the week. Pray with your family that God will help you slow down and prepare your hearts to celebrate Jesus.

### Week Two Dec 13-19

#### Shepherds' Candle - Purple

Today you will light three candles, the last two weeks and this week. As you light this week's candle, think with your family of ways you can spread joy during this advent season. This is the candle of JOY.

#### Scripture to Read - Luke 2:20

#### Song to Sing - The First Noel

### Week Two Reading Guide

Pick a time each day to read the Scripture together

<i>Sunday Dec 13:</i>	Mt 2:7-8
<i>Monday Dec 14:</i>	Mt 2:9
<i>Tuesday Dec 15:</i>	Mt 2:10-11
<i>Wednesday Dec 16:</i>	Mt 2:12-15
<i>Thursday Dec 17:</i>	Gal 4:4-5
<i>Friday Dec 18:</i>	Eph 2:8-9
<i>Saturday Dec 19:</i>	1Jn 4:7-16

### Advent Color symbols

Talk about what its symbols mean.

**Stars**— Stars remind us of the wise men. They followed the star that God used to guide them. They did not stop until they found Jesus.

**Bells**— Bells are a traditional call to worship. Whenever you see a bell this season, remember to worship God!

**Gifts**— Gifts represent the greatest gift of all. God gave us Christ, his only Son, as a sacrifice, so we can live!



### Challenge

*Kids preschool through sixth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for participating in the spiritual discipline of Bible study.*

*My Family Read Through the Week Two Reading Guide for Advent:*

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).