

## Something Better is Here Luke 1:57-80 by George K.

Four days to go until Christmas. Has everyone got everything sorted? My brother and I got into this habit of doing all our Christmas shopping all on one day in the Bullring Shopping Centre in Birmingham where around Christmas, it is rammed! For some reason, this became our tradition and we kept it up for quite a few years. We have traditions and it doesn't matter if there are better, quicker, cheaper, or more biblical ways of doing things. Most of the time,

it is absolutely fine. But tradition can get in the way and we need to know when to let a tradition go. In today's passage, John's birth signifies God fulfilling his promises and the dawning of salvation. This is a big moment, a turning point. Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary saw it. Something better is here! But there is a tradition getting in the way. Everyone knew the tradition of naming the son after the father. But being focused on the tradition meant they missed 'the something better'. My prayer this morning, is that we will grasp 'the something better', because the gift of God is better than tradition, so we must be willing to let tradition go. Bex spreads our Christmas shopping out over the year and you know what, it's great!

**1. The Breaking of Tradition** The passage starts with a miraculous baby being born. It reads as though this was a surprise. "Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy." This sentence is a full-scale promo for community living. They see God's mercy towards Elizabeth and share her joy! This is also another fulfilment of what the angel promised Zacariah. "He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth." (v14) The word of the Lord is standing true. Something better is here! On the eighth day [the neighbours and relatives] came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John," They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." What happens now? Zechariah confirms his name. Something better is here, but it calls us to let go of what cannot save. Churches are full of traditions. And you know what, most of the time the traditions are GOOD! But let's not take an 'O' out of good and make them gods. Sometimes they need to be laid to rest. The neighbours had combined something God had set up with something they had set up. If we do that, we give the tradition too much weight. This is not God ordained. Church history tells us that tradition, held rightly, is good. We have a lot to learn from those who have gone before us. But sadly tradition, elevated above its station, is the reason for too many disagreements and church splits over the years. Are there any traditions or ways of doing things that we have here at Ebenezer that are actually hindering the work of God? A lot of the arguments over tradition often come down to preference. We can flower it up by reeling off reasons as to why this tradition is 'biblical,' but let's not find ourselves making tradition law. Let's let our preferences slide for the sake of our unity to the gospel; 'the Something Better' that John was paving the way for. Zechariah stepped into the something better and "Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free to speak and praise God," What follows is Zechariah's prophesy known as The Benedictus. Zechariah speaks to those gathered around and tells them that something better is here and it affects the way we serve God.

**2. Better today** Zechariah begins his song by reaching back to the oath God swore to Abraham and the promise he made to David. A Saviour was coming. God had not forgotten. God had not failed. But listen carefully to how Zechariah speaks. He says: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them, He has raised up a horn of salvation for us." Past tense. Finished language. Completed action. Zechariah speaks as if it is already done because when God's promise begins to unfold it is as good as done. The birth of John signals that the dawn of salvation has begun.

God's people thought salvation would look like rescue from Rome, freedom from oppression, victory over earthly enemies. God does promise freedom from enemies but Zechariah goes deeper. John's role would be to show the people that their greatest enemy



was not Rome but sin. (v 77) "To give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins." is the most urgent need. John could not forgive sins. He pointed to the One who could. The One who would bear sin, atone for it, and remove it forever. This is what causes Zechariah to erupt in praise. "God has come to his people and redeemed them." Something better is here. This changes everything because it enables us to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." This is crucial. Before there can be peace between people, there must be peace between people and God. And God makes that peace through Jesus, before whom John prepares the way. We long to be right with God, to serve Him without fear and live in holiness and righteousness, not crushed by guilt or paralysed by anxiety. Fear runs deep in us. We know we are not enough. we have fallen short. we know we cannot defeat death. And so we cope. We distract ourselves with busyness, chasing success, control, approval, anything to quiet the fear. But it never goes away, it just bubbles under the surface. But Luke 1 stops us in our tracks. SOMETHING BETTER IS HERE. This Christmas, don't look elsewhere. Don't cling to what cannot save. Let it go because the gift of God is better. Jesus brings salvation through His life, death, and resurrection. He forgives sins. So that we are enabled, not to live fear-free lives, but to live fear-defying lives. But the Bible never promises the absence of fear. It promises freedom from being ruled by it. Let me ask, 'Will you step into the something better in Jesus, or will you cling to the tradition of fear?' This is what David wrote in Psalm 56, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" Something better is here.

If the gospel gave us peace and courage only for now it would already be more than tradition could ever offer. But Zechariah doesn't stop with today. The same forgiveness that frees us from fear today also gives us confidence for tomorrow. Something better is here that doesn't end with this life. Zechariah declares a finished reality: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them." Salvation is spoken of as a settled fact because it rests not on what God's people will do, but on what God has done. And that is where our assurance comes from. So the most important question is, 'Are you His people? If you repent of your sin and trust in Jesus (His life, His death, His resurrection) you are His people. You can say with confidence: "He has come to His people and redeemed them and I am one of them." Zechariah then describes salvation as: "Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us." (v 71) That Militaristic, Political language is intentional. It tells us that God's salvation is not fragile. It is a real victory over real enemies. Yet we know this victory is not yet fully realised. Christians are still persecuted, imprisoned, martyred. The enemies of God's people still rage. We live in the tension of the already and the not yet, But here is the key: The presence of enemies does not mean the absence of victory. The same salvation that frees us to serve without fear today guarantees a future where fear, enemies, and suffering are gone forever. This is a better hope for tomorrow. God's persecuted people across the world show us what this hope looks like. Though imprisoned, beaten, and killed, they serve Christ without fear because they know how the story ends. Something better is here and it will be fully enjoyed tomorrow. There is coming a day when every enemy is finally defeated, sin is no more, death is dead. When God's people are free forever.

But what about the neighbours and relatives who were going to continue on in the tradition and name the boy after his father? "All the neighbours were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it. asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him." (v65) Interestingly, the word translated as "awe" is phobos. It can be translated as awe, fear, alarm or terror. It is the word that we get "phobia" from. Something new, and better was here and fear came on the neighbours. Let's not develop a phobia of breaking traditions. If we do, we might miss the something better that God is doing. Tradition couldn't open Zechariah's mouth and it can't forgive your sins. Tradition couldn't bring salvation and it can't secure your eternity. But what tradition could never do, Jesus has done. The question Luke leaves us with is not whether we value tradition but whether we are willing to let it go when God brings something better. Trust the Saviour who has come.