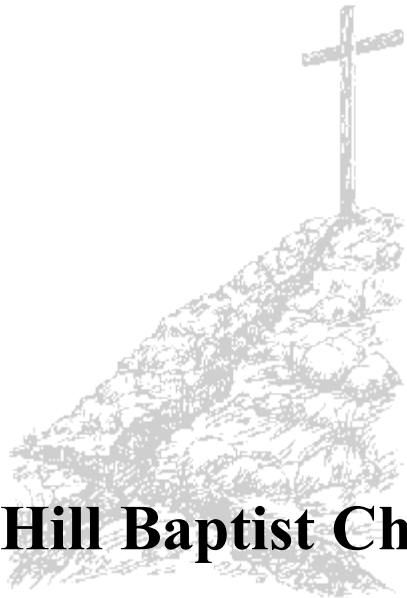


That You Might Know

Jesus In Christmas

Luke 1:1-80



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FOCAL Luke 1:1-4 KJV¹ Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, {2} Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; {3} It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, {4} That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

As we enter the Christmas season it **seemed good to me** to study what Christmas is all about. When you ask many people about Christmas they will tell you this season is about getting together as families, eating good food, exchanging presents, Santa Claus, Christmas trees - many, many things. But few people today focus on the true Celebrity of Christmas, Jesus Christ our Lord. As that old saying goes, "He is the reason for the season".

The birth of Jesus Christ was not something that *just happened*. His birth was *carefully orchestrated by the Triune God*. Throughout the Old Testament God *continually prophesied* that the Savior would come. The manner of His birth, His character, how He would live, how He would die - The Old Testament seems to exist to prophesy of the coming Savior. We can't study all of these prophesies, however, we will study a number of them as we approach and enter this Blessed Season. One Scripture emphasizes how carefully God orchestrated what He did when He came down to live and die for us:

¹ All Scripture quoted is King James Version, Unless otherwise noted

Galatians 4:4-6 But **when the fullness² of the time³ was come, God sent forth his Son, made⁴ of a woman**, made under the law, {5} To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. {6} And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

The Godhead had a timetable, an *exact* time when Jesus Christ was to come to earth and be born of a Virgin. That phrase **fullness of time** literally means **when time reached it's completion**. I want you to notice how the Scripture phrases this event.

2 G4138, πλήρωμα, plērōma, *play'-ro-mah*, From G4137; *repletion* or *completion*, that is, (subjectively) what *fills* (as contents, supplement, copiousness, multitude), or (objectively) what is *filled* (as container, performance, period): - which is put in to fill up, piece that filled up, fulfilling, full, fulness., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)

3 G5550, χρόνος, chronos, *khron'-os*, Of uncertain derivation; a space of *time* (in genitive case, and thus properly distinguished from G2540, which designates a *fixed* or special occasion; and from G165, which denotes a particular *period*) or *interval*; by extension an individual *opportunity*; by implication *delay*: - + years old, season, space, (X often-) time (-s), (a) while., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)

4 Aorist Deponent Participle, G1096, γίνομαι, ginomai, *ghin'-om-ahee*, A prolonged and middle form of a primary verb; to *cause to be* ("gen" -erate), that is, (reflexively) to *become* (*come into being*), used with great latitude (literally, figuratively, intensively, etc.): - arise be assembled, be (come, -fall, -have self), be brought (to pass), (be) come (to pass), continue, be divided, be done, draw, be ended, fall, be finished, follow, be found, be fulfilled, + God forbid, grow, happen, have, be kept, be made, be married, be ordained to be, partake, pass, be performed, be published, require, seem, be showed, X soon as it was, sound, be taken, be turned, use, wax, will, would, be wrought., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)

The Bible says, **God sent forth His Son**. It does not say, as many may read it, that **God sent forth His seed**.

No Beloved, it says, **God sent forth His Son**. The Father said, "Go - My Son", and at the appointed time Jesus entered Mary. He was not created in her womb, but **God sent forth His Son** - Eternal God the Father sent forth Eternal God the Son. Notice the next of the phrase, **made of a woman**. The *humanity* of Christ was made in Mary, but the Deity of Christ was **sent forth**. As we go further into the Book of Luke we will see that the humanity of Christ was created with the **Finger of God, God the Holy Spirit**. I pray as we go through this study

FOCAL Luke 1:4 ... **That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.**

John The Baptist

FOCAL Luke 1:5-7 **There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife [was] of the daughters of Aaron, and her name [was] Elisabeth. {6} And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. {7} And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both**

were [now] well stricken in years.

As God tells us the story of the birth of Christ, He doesn't *start* with Christ, but with a relatively *unknown priest* and his barren wife. Why was this important? Because some 700 years before God wrote through **the Prophet Isaiah**⁵ that the Messiah would have a *forerunner* or a *messenger* who would proceed Him. We read:

Isaiah 40:3-5 The **voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.** {4} Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: {5} And the **glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see [it] together:** for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken [it].

This messenger would proclaim that **God had come to men**, for he would cry out **Prepare ye the Way of the Lord**. What is the **Way of the Lord**? It is, as Jesus professed, none other than Himself. Jesus said:

John 14:6 **I am the way**, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

⁵ The Rabbis taught that Isaiah's father was a brother of King Amaziah, and thus Isaiah would be a first cousin to King Uzziah and of royal blood. See http://fly.hiwaay.net/~wgann/walk_ot/isaiah.htm

How does the birth of John the Baptist prove that Jesus Christ is the Messiah?

The prophet that would proceed Jesus, proclaiming the **Way of the Lord - the Way that is Christ** - was none other than John the Baptist. How do we know this? Because other Scripture affirms this truth. We read in

Matthew 3:1-3 In those days **came John the Baptist, preaching** in the wilderness of Judaea, {2} And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. {3} **For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet [Isaiah], saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.**

As a young man preaching in the wilderness, John himself recognized that he was the fulfillment of prophecy. We read:

John 1:20-23 [John said] ... I am not the Christ. {21} And they asked him, What then? Art thou [Elijah]? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. {22} Then said they unto him, **Who art thou?** that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? {23} He said, **I [am] the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of**

the Lord, as said the prophet [Isaiah].

Eternal God does not come on the scene without a suitable introduction. John the Baptist introduced Jesus Christ in a similar way that Aaron introduced Moses. Yet another prophecy came through the **Prophet Malachi** around *four hundred years earlier*:

Malachi 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in His later ministry, quoted Malachi to prove that John the Baptist was the Messenger of God. He said:

Matthew 11:9-11 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. {10} For this is [he], of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. {11} Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

I want you to notice that Almighty God *affirmed that John the Baptist was His Messenger*. He spoke for God, He told about the Coming God. So when we begin to read about an unknown priest named **Zacharias and his barren wife Elizabeth**, we are reading something very important. You see, if that Baby born in that manger was indeed the Messiah, then He had to fulfill prophecy - God's foretold truth - from the very beginning. Let's look at our focal text again:

FOCAL Luke 1:5-7 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a **certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife [was] of the daughters of Aaron,** and her name [was] Elisabeth.

Let's focus on this phrase for a moment, **Zacharias, of the course of Abia**. Zacharias was a *priest* of Israel, which means that he was of the Tribe of Levi. However, this dear man was *not* the High Priest. The High Priest always came from the *direct line of Aaron*. Zacharias was a priest, but he was a *common priest*, one of the many *courses* or *orders* of priests. You see, under the Law our Lord required that there be sacrifices made for sin. As Israel had grown, it was impossible for one priest to keep up with all of the sacrifices. Israel, just like us, was a sinning people!

In the time of David the King *divided* the Levitical priesthood into twenty-four orders or courses, and these priests worked on a rotation basis in the

Tabernacle of God.

The **course or order of Abia** was the *eighth order of Levi* according to **Matthew Henry**⁶, who writes:

The eighth of those was that of Abia (1 Chronicles 24:10), who was descended from Eleazar, Aaron's eldest son; but Dr. Lightfoot suggests that many of the families of the priests were lost in the captivity, so that after their return they took in those of other families, retaining the names of the heads of the respective courses.

Zacharias' wife **Elizabeth was of the daughters of Aaron**, whose direct male descendants were High Priests. So what we see in this text is that both Zacharias as well as Elizabeth were Levites, from two different and distant family groups in that line. The **historian Josephus** said that

The priests [were] very careful to marry within their own family, that they might maintain the dignity of the priesthood and keep it without mixture.⁶

They married - I suppose - as distant cousins would marry. This was not in violation of God's Law, for we read:

FOCAL Luke 1:6 **And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the**

⁶ Matthew Henry's Commentary, e-sword library

commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

They were blameless in the way they kept the Law of God. So their marriage was pure, though they both originated from the Tribe of Levi. What else do we see about these two dear saints? We read:

FOCAL Luke 1:7 **And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were [now] well stricken in years.**

In ancient times it was considered *shameful* when a woman did not bear a child to her husband. God had promised Israel:

Deuteronomy 7:14 Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle.

The only time God allowed barrenness to come on a family in Israel was when either *that family was in gross sin*, or when *God wanted to show His magnificent Grace*.

As people looked at Elizabeth, now **well stricken in years**, they - as did Lot's friends - assumed that she or her husband were *deficient* in God's sight. Even

Elizabeth thought herself to be deficient, for we read:

Luke 1:24-25 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, {25} Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on [me], to take away my reproach among men.

How often have God's people felt pain, and believed that this pain was a result of some deficiency that we cannot perceive. My Beloved, do not cry when your life seems barren. If you, as Zacharias and Elizabeth, are serving Him with *all your heart*, it may be with that God wants to do a mighty work. God's mightiest works are not performed through the strong, but through the weak! When our hand trembles most, His power is strongest manifest. When we have no ability, and yet in our inability continue to seek His face, become a tool in the hand of the Almighty. As God has said:

Jeremiah 17:5-8 Thus saith the LORD; Cursed [be] the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. {6} For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, [in] a salt land and not inhabited. {7} Blessed [is] the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope

the LORD is. {8} For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and [that] spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

What lesson can I learn through the birth of John?

Are you **well stricken in years**? Do you feel that **God's presence has abandoned you**? Do you feel that *all is against you*? Then no matter! Seek His Face, do what He has called you to do. If you are the *least* of His priests, you are *still a priest*. Serve Him, glorify Him, focus on Him, love Him. Do what God has bid you do, no matter what, and He shall exalt you. Do as both **Zacharias and Elizabeth** did:

1 Peter 5:6-7 **Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:** {7} Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

If you belong to God by faith in Christ, then remember above all else that **you belong to God**. Serve, be faithful, and He will, just as He did with Job, raise you back to your feet. Do your job, whatever He has called you to do

FOCAL **Luke 1:8-10** And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, {9} According to the custom of the

priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. {10} And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

Notice that the blessings of God *always* come when we're doing what we're supposed to do.

Zacharias was **executing the priest's office before God in the order of his course**. While he did his job in the Temple, on the outside of the Temple **the whole multitude of the people were praying**, which is what God commanded in **Exodus 30:17**⁷. The incense, as it burned, smoked, and that smoke symbolized prayers going up to God. The Psalmist said:

Psalms 141:2 Let **my prayer be set forth before thee [as] incense**; [and] the lifting up of my hands [as] the evening sacrifice.

Revelation 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and **there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer [it] with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne**.

⁷ Malachi 1:11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name [shall be] great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense [shall be] offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name [shall be] great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

When God's people are obedient, worshiping and glorifying Him, then great things will come.

We cannot come to Church and be focused on what others are doing or not doing and expect to be blessed. We cannot come to Church for our own entertainment, nor to be lifted up above God.

God is God, and when we meet we are supposed to worship and glorify Him. As everyone was serving God, we next see this:

FOCAL Luke 1:11 And there appeared unto him **an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar** of incense.

The angel **Gabriel** doesn't immediately introduce himself. In fact, it is not until Zacharias asks for confirmation - almost doubting that angel - that the angel introduces himself as Gabriel:

Luke 1:19 And **the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God**; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

Gabriel that stand in the presence of God emphasizes that this is one of the mightiest of angels. If this angel **stands in the presence of God** then he must be one of the chief angels, a *cherub*, a guardian in the throne room

of God. This Gabriel is a powerful angel. We see him first mentioned in:

Daniel 8:16 And I heard a man's voice between [the banks of] Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this [man] to understand the vision.

as the angel sent to explain the *seventy weeks* to Daniel (see also **Daniel 9:21**). Gabriel appeared to Daniel, to Zacharias, and would later appear to **the virgin Mary** - and in each case he would tell wonderful things. Why doesn't Gabriel immediately mention who he is? Because who Gabriel was was of little importance. What was important was *the message he brought*. Notice once more that this angel was

FOCAL Luke 1:11 ... **standing on the right side of the altar** of incense.

The **right side** is the side of power in Scripture. Gabriel came and presented himself to Zacharias in answer to prayer, and because **both prayer and Providence met** in this place of worship. It was time, it was the **fullness of time**, and God's messenger must be announced. Compared with all this, Gabriel's name was of little importance. Here is the great message:

FOCAL Luke 1:13-17 **But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.** {14} And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many

shall rejoice at his birth. {15} For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. {16} And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. {17} And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Again, this was an answer to prayer. Gabriel says to Zacharias, **your prayer was heard**. Zacharias had probably nearly given up hope for a child. As he served in the Temple, burning incense at the altar of God, this dear saint - perhaps with tears and pleading - had been seeking God for a child. I can understand his heart, that heart of desperation. Perhaps you can understand it, too. As he burned incense he prayed, **God, if I could but have one son.**

God answered Zacharias' prayer, but as is usually the case with God, our Father answered the prayer *abundantly*. Zacharias would not only have a son, but this son would be a Nazarite, specially dedicated to God.

We read:

FOCAL Luke 1:13-17 For **he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink**

neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. {16} And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. {17} And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The **Nazarite** (not a Nazarene, which is something else entirely) was a special group of people within Israel. Their requirements were set forth in:

Numbers 6:2-8 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, **When either man or woman shall separate [themselves] to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate [themselves] unto the LORD:** {3} He shall separate [himself] from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. {4} All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. {5} All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth [himself] unto the LORD, he shall be holy, [and] shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. {6} All the days that he separateth [himself] unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. {7} He shall not make himself unclean for his

father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God [is] upon his head. {8} All the days of his separation he [is] holy unto the LORD.

The Nazarite⁸ vow was generally taken *voluntarily* by someone who wanted to be consecrated to God. But

John was a Nazarite *from birth*. He did not dedicate himself, but *God dedicated him*. John was **filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb**.

This was necessary, because as the messenger of God John would **prepare ye the Way of the Lord**. The great preacher C.H. Spurgeon stated⁹:

... no man will come to Christ while he is utterly careless and thoughtless! Faith is a matter of thought; it requires a mind aroused from slumber, a mind that has taken wing; and John the Baptist did good service for his Master when he startled men into that condition, and so made them consider their ways. He did more than that, for, having first made them think, he preached to them a Savior. He told them that One was coming with power to baptize them after a higher

8 Smith's Bible Dictionary states, **Of the Nazarites for life, three are mentioned in the Scriptures -- Samson, Samuel and St. John, the Baptist. The only one of these actually called a Nazarite is Samson. We do not know whether the vow for life was ever voluntarily taken by the individual. In all the cases mentioned in the sacred history, it was made by the parents before the birth of the Nazarite himself.**

9 "A PEOPLE PREPARED FOR THE LORD." NO. 2404 intended for reading on LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 17TH, 1895, delivered by C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MARCH 13TH, 1887.

sort than his baptism. He cried, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” and this message infused into the people a measure of hope. The poor people said, “What shall we do?” for they had a hope that there was something to be gained. Even the tax-gatherers, despised as they were, began to look up, and think that there might be something even for them, so they said to John, “Master, what shall we do?” And the rough Roman soldiers thought, “There may be something for us,” so they also asked, “And what shall we do?” John inspired the multitudes with hope.

Zacharias could hardly believe that God would give him such a great gift of Grace. When he doubted the Word of God, the angel of God took away his ability to speak. The next time Zacharias would speak would be when he obediently *named the child in accordance with God's Word*. When Zacharias came from the Temple the people expected him to say a *benediction*:

Luke 1:22-23 And when he came out, **he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.** {23} And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

but he could only motion to them.

When the preacher does not *speak the Word of God*, then

he should not speak! Some preachers use the pulpit as a time to joke, tell stories, and carry on. Others use the pulpit to magnify the people or themselves. Nay, I tell you! There are times when we can speak with humor, but never should the focus of the preacher be away from God the Son! It is He Who matters, and not we ourselves!

We see the conclusion of this matter in:

FOCAL Luke 1:57-62 Now **Elisabeth's** full time came that she should be delivered; and she **brought forth a son.** {58} And her neighbors and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. {59} And it came to pass, that on the **eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.** {60} And his mother answered and said, **Not [so]; but he shall be called John.** {61} And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. {62} And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

When the child of Israel was circumcised, that child was always named. Those of the Temple who performed the circumcision felt that the child should be named Zacharias, but Elizabeth knew better. She knew the child's name should be called John. **Hitchcock's Bible Names Dictionary** states that

"John" means the grace or mercy of God. Smith's Bible Dictionary says that "John" means Jehovah's Gift.

The name "John" is a name of Grace, of a free gift, undeserved but given from the overflowing heart of a Loving God. The Temple officials looked at Zacharias and asked him, "What should that baby be named?" They knew in their hearts that this dear saint would want the baby named after himself. What happened next astonished everyone. This man, now *nine months unable to speak*,

FOCAL Luke 1:63-65 And he **asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John.** And they marveled all. {64} And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue [loosed], and he spake, and **praised God.**

This should be a warning to us all. If God has given you a mouth to speak, then speak His Word. Praise Him, give glory to Him. God is good, much better than we deserve. Love Him with all you hearts. Obey Him, trust in Him. God will do mighty things among a people surrendered to Him. Once Zacharias surrendered his will to God, God richly blessed him. Look at the sermon he preached:

FOCAL Luke 1:67-69 **Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied,**

saying, {68} **Blessed [be] the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, {69} And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David**

As Zacharias preached, he preached *about Jesus*. He said that **God ... hath raised up a horn of salvation ... in the house of His servant David**. Remember we stated at the beginning that both Zacharias and Elizabeth were **of the house of Levi**? The **horn of salvation** is not from Levi, but from **the house of David, Judah**. Once John the Baptist was born, that special Messenger of Christ, the One he represented was not far away. As a matter of fact, John was *about 5 months older* than the humanity of Jesus Christ. The Lord was coming, coming to save Israel, come to save the world. Zacharias went on to say:

FOCAL Luke 1:76-80 And **thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;** {77} **To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, {78} Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, {79} To give light to them that sit in darkness and [in] the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. {80} And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.**

John the Baptist would never set himself above Jesus Christ. The greatest prophet who ever lived, a prophet so great that he was compared to Elijah and Moses, John would do one thing and one thing well. He would preach about the **Dayspring from on High Who has visited us**. He would warn that Jesus Christ was the only Way unto God. **Remission of sins** would come through Jesus and Jesus alone.

May God touch your hearts with these words.

