

Morning...

Short intro to story of Zechariah and Elizabeth....

Luke the doctor writes about the story of Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth who gave birth to John the Baptist. And Zechariah sings this song Luke 1 v 67-80

Luke writes the gospel we read by him with the aim to bring an accurate and detailed knowledge and understanding of the truth of Christianity.

This truth is not found by studying philosophy or some mystic experience but by looking on the detail and facts of the life of Jesus. This is the only place we find the basic certainties and values of life, everything else, in the end, will be washed away.

Luke starts this story about Jesus with God speaking to Zachariah through an angel. God has not spoken to his people for 400 years. If you look in your bibles p... the last thing he said in Malachi 4 v5 was "See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." And then came 400years where we are not aware of him speaking again until ... the angel comes to Zechariah and say he will have a son to be called John who (Luke 1 v15-17 page...) "will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous (through Christ) to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Everything here is pointing to Jesus! What God spoke 400 years ago and then the first thing he said again, was for getting people ready for His son coming to Earth. It sounds a bit like Superman, an extraordinary human being from another place being amongst us. It can be easy to read the gospels and just think Jesus was a great man and wise and had special access to God and forget this man is God. He is totally human like me and you lived on earth as we do sharing the same pains and burdens we do. We can look to him as who we want to be like, think what did he do in that situation? What can we learn from him? However this passage also reminds us that He is also God! God amongst us! God didn't just throw him out there and hope we might notice him, he made a way, he spoke to his people, he prepared us for His Son, for us to meet with God himself in a way never experienced and known before.

And what did he say to prepare us? Not only did he spoke throughout the Old Testament of our coming Savior, here specifically he used Malachi the prophet and John The Baptist with the purpose to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and children to their fathers. Why? Is this relevant, important, what does God mean by this?

What was John's purpose? To prepare the way for Christ. What was Christ's purpose? To restore your relationship and mine with our Father in heaven. He died for us, why? Because each of us makes such a mess of our lives that we cannot come close to God on our own. He is perfect and we are dirty. Jesus died and took that dirt and mess away so that we can be made new again and we can come to God as righteous, perfect, because of Christ. This isn't just a restoration of a human being and God; this is a child coming to his or her Father. Yes I have my mum and Dad who gave birth to me but actually my number ONE Father is actually my Father in heaven. (Don't tell my dad I said that) God knew and created me and the plans for my life even before my parents knew they were having a baby.

I spent a long time believing that I am made up of mum and Dad and then God came along later and got involved and as I get to know Him I hopefully become more like him. However, God has spent a long time showing me that first and above every other part of my identity I am a child of God, I am His daughter.

God cares about our relationship with our earthly Father because he knows how it can effect and form us. And then this can? then affect our relationship with Him, our heavenly Father. If my Dad sometimes made me not feel good enough it is easy to think the same with God, how can God really love me? I may look at myself, maybe I don't do enough good things, I hurt people, I take drugs, I hate my neighbours, I don't read the bible much, I'm just not good enough and don't deserve to be loved. Maybe I try and earn it, or maybe I just refuse to receive his love. And yet God loves me, He loves you. You are his beloved child and his love never changes, he cannot stop loving you. His love is unconditional. You actually cannot earn it and you cannot make him stop loving you.

What he asks of us, like to obey him, to love our enemies, to pray, to come to him and ask for forgiveness etc.... are not conditions on us so we can be loved by Him. They are responses by us to His love, they are ways we can know him more, be whole, be set free, be saved, be forgiven. As we worship and humble ourselves and come before him these are all to be done as a child to a Father in love. They are nothing to do with why we are loved.

PAUSE

God spoke to Zechariah of His plan, of John the Baptist, of his role to make a way for the true restorer of children to their fathers and fathers to their children, Jesus. Christ made a way for me and you back to our first Father. Are you restored to your Father in heaven? I am not asking if you have done enough good things, I am asking you do you truly believe God, your Father loves you right now, just as you are? We may be a mess and that is why he sent his son Jesus to die for us, to bring me back to Him. He made the first move not you. He made the way not you. He loves you today as you are with all our dirt and issues. Are you willing to be loved not because you are good enough but because you are His child and He can't help it. Can you come to that place and receive His love? It is actually harder than we think yet so simple it seems like it can't be true.

Can you turn to the person next to you and discuss the question for 3 minutes "the gospel makes it clear that God's love is free and unconditional, talk with your neighbor reasons why we might really struggle to believe this deep in our hearts?"

Zechariah's song (and prophesy) sings of God's extraordinary plan to bring salvation to his people. Zechariah knows that he is a part of this. Zechariah clearly loved God and obeyed God and had given his whole life to God. His wife was barren and God had not spoken for 400 years. Yet Zechariah was faithful. I know in my own life there are particular areas that yes I do feel disappointed in, my hopes haven't come true and yet I do believe God's love for me is great and his faithfulness endures forever (psalm 117v2). That doesn't always feel so good and to be honest it makes me question Him at times and affects how I speak to Him, how I worship him, and I can feel lost at times. I am 35, I would love to be married and have children. I don't understand why this is part of God's plan that I have neither and I am sure Zechariah and Elizabeth did not understand why the God they loved and served had not given them children. However, God did have a greater plan than theirs. It was to be in his timing. And when he spoke to Zechariah through an angel actually Zechariah's reaction was not one of a faithful servant but of a man maybe a bit disillusioned, he said "How can I be sure of this?"

If an angel came to me, let alone spoke, I like to think I would just blindly believe, but we see the truth of our hearts when God asks us to trust Him, to step outside of the faith we see as probably enough and He asks more of us than we think we can do. Zechariah was struck dumb because he did not believe the words of the angel. He had acted blamelessly all his life following God's commands, he was even upright in the sight of God the bible tells us, yet he could not believe this was the plan and he was to be a part of it. It was just too much.

Over time Zechariah saw God's faithfulness as the baby grew inside his barren wife's womb. He became soft again in God's hands realizing that God was truly doing something extraordinary and beautiful and beyond man's understanding. He gave over, he became soft clay again, ready to be molded by God. And then his son was born. To follow tradition his family said you can't call this baby John, it isn't a family name, but Zechariah wasn't going to fight God anymore. He said yes God, whatever you want, whatever you have planned is best and wrote down His name is John. In these few words he was saying to God "you are more important than my family and culture and traditions, I bow down to you above everyone, even myself. As he did this, as he humbled himself completely, his voice was given back to him and he was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied the song we heard Audrey read.

This song is a celebration of who God is. That He has made a way for His people to come back to him. Even though we are stubborn and undeserving He is willing to save us. What God did in giving a barren woman a son was to prepare the way for a virgin to give birth to God's own son. He used the weak to shame the wise.

God spoke promises over his people and his promises became true, became flesh, and are still true for us today. God found a way to restore the ultimate relationship of father with child and child with father through His son Jesus, He found a way of once and for all showing us his unconditional love as our Father, that no one deserves, through Christ coming and dying for us on the cross. He gave his son for you.

This is a song of praise to God, looking back to times of pain and confusion but also of where God has come and does fulfill his promises and a song of looking forward to His promises in hope. That hope is in Jesus. If we don't know that hope what do we do? We go back to the beginning and we God why he loves me when I don't deserve it. Who am I? Where do I fit in this all? And he says "because you are my son, you are my daughter, whom I love: with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3 v22). God spoke these same words over Jesus, his son, when he was baptized; this was before he had DONE anything. No miracles, no teaching, nothing. God just loved him because he was His child. And you can come before him and do nothing but let **Him** show you his love and receive it, with no justification but Christ. It only is because of Him we can do this, receive this free love. He has made a way for us.