Luke 1vv57-80
Imagine with me if you will, that you are working at the Chuv. But imagine that it was 2000 years ago, and not in Lausanne, but in the land of Judea. You've had a busy morning and you're thirsty so you pop down to the main entrance, to visit the cafe. As you get there you notice an elderly couple with some luggage, the lady is huddled over a walking frame. They are both standing there looking lost. Being a helpful employee you wander over to them.
'Can I help you?' you enquire gently to the man.
The man… says nothing,
… but then the elderly woman pipes up.
'we're lost, we're not sure where to go?' she says.
You make the decision for them and point them off in the right direction
'The elderly care wards are that way'
Again the man says nothing, but the woman looks a little embarrassed.
'I'm sure they are dear, but we need the maternity ward.'
You blush a little, and apologise
*'I'm terribly sorry, only I saw your luggage and thought you were here as a patient. Is it your grandchild you're here to visit, or **great** grand-child perhaps?'*
The gentleman smiles… but says nothing
'No, no dear' the lady says *'it's **me** who is about to give birth!'*

What might you feel?
Surprise,
embarrassment,
disbelief?

Well I hope that helps to give us some idea of the background to our passage this morning.
Its about a husband and wife - Zechariah and Elizabeth, who we are told earlier in Luke chapter 1, are without a child and 'well along in years'. Now one day when Zechariah is in the temple an angel of the Lord,… a messenger from God, appeared to him and told him how ***even though*** he and his wife were very old, and had never had kids - they were going to have one now - and they were to call him John
And John would have the important role of getting people ready for what God was about to do, in sending his Christ, his Messiah
God is about to unveil his great salvation plan for the world, and their son, si going to kick things off!
Zechariah didn't believe this was possible… and so because he doubts what God is going to do, he is made silent. He is unable to speak until the child arrives.
Nine months later, the child is born….
which brings us to our passage for today…

Back in chapter 1, verse 20… the angel Gabriel said to Zechariah
And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.
... Well, **those words** are now being fulfilled for in vv57-66 - we read how Elizabeth has given birth and she wants to call the baby John!
But her neighbours think this is a bit weird (v61)
"*...there is no familial link to that name... Surely he is to be named after his father!... Best check with Zechariah*", they think to themselves

But Zechariah grabs a pen - he is still mute - and confirms that the baby is to be called John!
It's quite the turnaround isn't it!
… Whereas before, Zechariah did not believe God could do this
…nut now having had nine months to think about it - and now seeing for himself, God's promise come true… there is Elizabeth, with child!
Now he does
And so he responds in obedience, and confirms that the child is to be called John
And, as soon as he does this - he is able to speak again!!
His tongue is loosed - it is set free

Now here's the thing - if you had not been able to speak for 9 months - what would be the first thing you would say
We could maybe understand it, if he began with words of resentment or frustration...
But then again... he **has** just witnessed the birth of his child - so maybe a word of congratulations to his wife - which would certainly be deserved
But actually, what we see in verse 67 and following, is that Zechariah breaks into a song of praise to God

Nine months ago he **was** a man who doubted God's word, now he is shouting about it - as he sees that God **is** at work in the world, bringing about his great plan of salvation
And so as we look at these verses together, **we** see 3 reasons to praise God...

There will be lots of things we can spend our time doing this week, but I want us to see this morning three reasons to praise God…

#1 - A promise kept
That is to say… God sent Jesus to save people, just as He promised (vv68-75)
We see in v67 that Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesies.
- his words are directed by God himself,
So we can be sure that Zechariah isn't just speculating about what God **might do**... God is using Zechariah to tell us, what He **will do.**

*Now the interesting thing about these verses is that they are actually talking about the future - about what God **will do** in the future*
Why then you ask, are they written in the past tense?
Well we get this elsewhere in the bible too - and it happens when things are so certain to take place, it is as though they already have!
*Zechariah speaks in the **past** tense about **future** events, because what God has promised he will do - he WILL do*

A bit like when we use the phrase... "Consider it done"
- it's not done,
- … but because it is certain to happen - you can consider it already done
So it is here… God "redeeming his people"- consider it done - it's a a given, it's certain

So as Zechariah sings - he is looking to the future... when these things will take place
… When God makes a promise, "consider it done"

So in v68… God **has** visited and **has** redeemed his people!!

As he looks back on all the events of the past 9 months, recorded for us in this 1st chapter of Luke's gospel - all that has happened - Zechariah recognises that the promised time of salvation has come!

In v70 - he says that what is happening is just as God promised in the Old Testament
In v71&72 Zechariah describes God's work as ***a work of salvation and mercy***
And then reminds us again (v73) that God promised to do this - he swore an oath - ***he made a covenant.***

God is going to save people, redeem people, rescue people… consider it done!
And the means by which he will do this… is Jesus... the Christ... the Messiah... God's promised eternal King!

Let me read again, verse 69…
…Zechariah is praising God for raising up a horn of salvation in the house of his servant David
A horn is a biblical picture of strength, of power
Zechariah is saying how God is raising up this powerful saviour
… He's talking here about Jesus being born

And this is why as Christians we celebrate Christmas. Because we know that in Jesus being born on this earth, it was the beginning of the fulfilment of God's promises to his people.
It was the beginning of God's salvation.
It was God acting decisively to save his people, to save us.

So it is great news, and I think a great comfort also, to be reminded that God is not random, or unfaithful. He is the God who makes a promise and brings it to fulfilment.

God promised to save us and has done so. As Zechariah says...'Praise be to the Lord'.
Do we believe it?
Will we sing about it?

So although we may have expected that Zechariah would begin by praising God for the safe arrival of his **own** son - we see that he actually, begins by singing about the one to whom John will point to - Jesus… the Christ.

But then in vv76-79 - Zechariah begins to sing of what John will do
And as he does this - as he explains John's role in God's great plan of salvation - we see that it is Jesus who will save people, by providing forgiveness for their sins…

#2 - A pardon to receive

You see the arrival of Jesus is great, and not just because it shows God being true to his promises.

God's plan and provision of salvation extends far beyond God simply staying faithful to His word.
Tied up with the promise of salvation, is the forgiveness of **our** sins.

In v76 - Zechariah talks about his son, John
"you my child, will be called the prophet of the Most High" - that is a prophet of God

... John - you will go ahead of the Lord, to *"prepare a way for him"*
Just like all of God's prophets - he will speak...
John will prepare the way - get people ready - let them know just who Jesus is

And so in verse 77 we get his job description...
"[John is] *to give people the knowledge of salvation"*

John's role is to tell people how they can be saved though having their sins forgiven
That is his job - that is how he will prepare people for the arrival of Jesus

Meet JtB at a christmas party and ask him what he does for a living…
"I tell people how they can have their sins forgiven"
And so if John does his job properly - when people see Jesus, they will say "there is the saviour - he will save us by forgiving us our sins"

… which raises the question, *"who do **we** see when we look at jesus - our saviour who brings forgiveness… or is he still a baby in the manger?*
… because to still think Jesus is only a baby… that would be weird…
must not keep Jesus as a baby in a manger…

John is not to just be showing people cute baby photos of Jesus
no no… not at all…
John is to testify to the great work that Jesus is to accomplish. John will inform people, tell people, fill them in on what salvation is all about, tell them that their sins can be forgiven. He will prepare the people.
But John is not the one who will accomplish it. Forgiveness of sin, forgiveness of our sins is accomplished only by Jesus. It's Jesus who saves us.
You see it's Jesus, who not only took our nature upon him during his birth.
… He took our sin, our guilt and our condemnation in His death.
It's Jesus who took the punishment for our sins, and it's Jesus who suffered God's anger for our sins.
It's summed up beautifully at the end of v78… Jesus gives light to those in darkness

So the second reason to praise God for his plan of salvation is that our sins can be forgiven. It is through Jesus' death on the cross that our sins are paid for.

I think JC Ryle, the once Bishop of Liverpool, puts it well ...
"Christ, ... has purchased a full forgiveness, if only we are willing to receive it. He has done all, paid all, suffered all that was needful to reconcile us to God. He has provided a garment of righteousness to clothe us. He has opened a fountain of living waters to cleanse us. He has removed every barrier between us and God the Father, taken every obstacle out of the way, and made a road by which the vilest may return. All things are now ready, and the sinner has only to believe and be saved, to eat and be satisfied, to ask and receive, to wash and be clean."

Are we willing to freely receive forgiveness of our sins?
Do we praise God for it?
… Because of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven, if we trust in him.
As Zechariah says... 'Praise be to the Lord.'

So we have seen that this **knowledge**, brought by John the Baptist, prepares the way for the coming of Jesus.

… but this knowledge is not merely theoretical or mental, but deeply experiential - ... knowing Jesus as our saviour, results in a fundamental change of heart and behaviour

...Which is our 3rd reason to praise God...

#3 - A path to follow

What i mean by that is this… forgiven people, are saved to serve… I wonder if any of you have ever been challenged by the words *'it's easy for you Christians, you can be happy because you believe your sins are forgiven. You don't have to worry. You can just sit back and take it easy!'*

People can think that Christianity is like Christmas afternoon

… everything is done - you just sit back in a comfy chair, receive forgiveness, put your feet up and fall asleep.

But that just is not true.

It **is true** that our sins **will be** forgiven if we trust in Jesus ,

… But we are also called to follow a path.

You see the purpose of us being saved, God's plan for our salvation, is that we can now follow him.

Before (v79), we were in darkness and we could not see the path!

But the light has come and now we can see where we are to walk...

As v74 puts it …We are to serve him.

… we are saved that we may serve.

… and v75 - to live holy lives, to act righteously… all our days

But do notice that it is not the service of a tyrant, where we are forced to serve against our will, and do so, for we fear the consequences if we don't!! There is no fear.

It's actually that God's salvation, **enables** us to serve.

'**Granted**' would be a more accurate word, for this **service** is actually a privilege which God gives to us.

… And a privilege in which the christian believer is to delight.

You see it's only **once** we're saved, once our sins are forgiven, that we **can** serve God.

we are not just to coo, at a baby in a manger… but follow our saviour… walk in his ways

Years ago a Salvation Army officer, Captain Shaw, went to India as a medical missionary to a leper colony.

His eyes welled with tears as he saw three lepers in front of him, their hands and feet bound by chains that cut into their diseased flesh.

Shaw turned to the guard and said, "Please unfasten these chains."

"But it isn't safe," the guard replied. "These men are not just lepers; they're dangerous criminals."

"I'll be responsible; they're suffering enough," Shaw said, as he took the keys, and tenderly removed the shackles and treated their bleeding ankles and wrists.

About two weeks later Captain Shaw had his first misgivings about freeing these criminals. He had to make an overnight trip and feared leaving his wife and child alone.

His wife insisted that she wasn't afraid; God would protect her. So the doctor left.

The next morning when Mrs. Shaw went to her door, she was startled to see the three criminals lying on her steps.

One explained, "We know the doctor had to go away. We stayed here all night so that no harm would come to you."

That was their response to the doctor's act of love for them—to serve him freely out of gratitude.

And that is the Christian's response to what God has done in saving us—to give our lives in service to Him.

As Zechariah says... 'Praise be to the Lord.'