

Kiama Anglican Church

Christ Church Kiama with St. Paul's Minnamurra

The Songs of Christmas

Welcoming the Incarnation



Studies Around the Coming of Jesus

Luke 1-3

A GUIDE TO THE STUDIES

Welcoming the Incarnation

The Songs of Christmas

Studies around the coming of Jesus

Bible Studies : December 2010

The Songs of Christmas

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.'

Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor gives birth
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.

He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
And he will be their peace."

Micah 5:2-5a

With the prophetic words of Micah in our hearts and minds, we come to the place of the promised ruler for God's people - the stable at Bethlehem.

We come alongside Mary, Jesus' expectant mother; Zechariah, Jesus' spirit-filled Uncle; those at Jesus' stable, the shepherds and the angels; and John the Baptist - the people whose voices echoed songs of joy, fulfilment, promise, truth and peace as they sang of Jesus Christ,

Steve Stanis - December 2010

Study

Passage

5th December Mary's Song	Luke 1:46-56
12th December Zechariah's Song	Luke 1: 67-80
19th December The Song of Jesus Birth	Luke 2:1-7
26th December The Song of John The Baptist	Luke 3: 1-6

This short set of studies seeks to set our minds on Jesus, the Lord and Saviour whose birth as a helpless babe we remember at Christmas. The studies are a little shorter than usual and I have attempted to design them this time for either group or individual study. Each study includes a verse to meditate upon. Christian meditation is not a looking inward to find truth but a serious contemplation of the truth about God we find in the Bible. I would encourage you to give serious focused thought to each word and phrase of these verses.

References:

Bock, Darrel L, The NIV Application Commentary : Luke (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996).

Liefeld, W. "Luke" in Gaebelin, F.E., Douglas J.D. (Eds) THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE COMMENTARY (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1990) (Cited as EBC)

Marshall, I.H. 'Luke' in Carson, D.A., France, R.T, Motyer, J.A., Wenham, G.J. (Eds) NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY : 21st Century Edition (LEICESTER, IVP, 1994) (Cited as NBC).

Morris, Leon, The Gospel According to St. Luke (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (IVP, Leicester, 1974).(Cited as TNTC)

Wilcock, M. The Saviour of the World : The Message of Luke's Gospel (The Bible Speaks Today) (Leicester, IVP, 1979) (Cited as BST)

THE SECTIONS OF THE STUDIES**Read the Bible**

This is the passage for the week. Most are short and should be read as a whole and then read again. The focus is Scripture not just the questions.

The Questions

The following three sections are the study proper. This time I have tried to design them to be suitable both for group meetings and/or for individual use.

Explore the Basics

These look at the basic ideas in the passage. I would recommend that each week you at least do these.

Deeper and Wider

As the heading suggests these dig deeper into the themes of the passage or look more widely at Scripture.

Apply

These Questions should be done each week or at least you should work hard each week to APPLY the lessons learnt to daily, everyday, hard slog, of living for Christ in our world.

We need to make the rubber of the 'idea' hit the road of our lives, thoughts and actions. - One of the problems in writing 'application' type questions is not knowing where all the individuals are up to. If you can see a better application of the material - DO IT. - The important thing is to relevantly apply what we are talking about to our lives.

Meditate.

This is a small section of the scripture for the week. The idea is to contemplate it carefully. Look for significance in each part/word of the verse and how they apply to Jesus, Christmas, and living for him.

Note the comment about meditation in the introduction to the study booklet:

Each study includes a verse to meditate upon. Christian meditation is not a looking inward to find truth but a serious contemplation of the truth about God we find in the Bible. I would encourage you to give serious focused thought to each word and phrase of these verses.

For next week : This is the passage for next week.

Please note that my answers below are not the 'correct' answers or what you are trying to get to in the study. I have set them out as a guide to my thinking only and assistance to you.

This guide is meant to be the start of the assistance I am willing to give in regard to the studies. If you need anything further DO NOT hesitate to contact me. (BUT - Sorry, we will be out of the country from Dec 1st - 22nd)

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Study 1: Luke 1:46-56

The Song of Mary

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully.

TNTC – *“The song of Mary (called the Magnificat from its opening word in the Latin translation) is an outburst of praise largely in Old Testament language. In particular there are several resemblances to the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1–10). But there is a difference in tone. Hannah’s song is a shout of triumph in the face of her enemies; Mary’s a humble contemplation of the mercies of God. Ford asks whether some later poet may have composed the song and attributed it to Mary; but he thinks it more likely that Mary on her four days’ journey to Elizabeth brooded over the story of Hannah and then uttered her own inspired song.”*

1. Who is singing this song? Who is she visiting?

This song is sung by Mary who is at this stage pregnant with the baby Jesus. You probably need to look at Luke 1v26-45 to get a grasp on what has happened to Mary here.

Mary has gone to visit (1:39) her cousin Elizabeth who is six months pregnant with the baby John the Baptist.

2. What does Mary sing about herself?

In v 46-49 the focus is on Mary, the singer here.

The impressive thing here is Mary great humility.

From a purely human personal point of view these events must have been very difficult for her to cope with but her focus here is on the graciousness of God towards her.

Mary recognises that she has done nothing to deserve this she is merely a humble servant of the LORD.

Mary recognises that she will be called ‘blessed’ but also that the praise is to go to the one who does the blessing, God, not to Mary who has received the blessing.

Bock – *“We should not miss the significance of the testimony about these children that comes through this grateful mother-to-be. Three points are central: (1) Mary’s child is especially blessed, being at the center of God’s fresh activity; (2) there is amazement in being any part of these astounding events; and (3) joy and blessing come to those who believe that God does what he says.”*

3. What is she saying God has done and will do through what is happening to her?

God has bestowed mercy (v50), he has shown his might (v51), he has exercised his rule (v52), he has bestowed blessing (v53) and he has kept his promises (kept covenant) with Israel (v54-55).

Judgement is shown to the proud, the ‘rulers’, the ‘rich’.

Mercy and blessing is given to those who fear the Lord, the humble, the poor and God’s servant Israel.

And all of this is to be done through the babe currently in Mary’s womb.

Bock – *“A shift of tenses from present (v. 46b) to past (vv. 47–48a) to future (v. 48b) shows the broadening scope of her basis for praise. The idea that all generations will praise her (v. 48b) leads to the idea of how God treats other “God-fearers” (vv. 49–53).”*

NBC – *“The shape of the song is that a shout of exultation to God is followed by a series of clauses indicating why he is to be praised. After the briefest reference to Mary’s own reason for thanksgiving, the song tells of what God does for his people, speaking quite concretely of his judgments on the mighty and his blessings for the humble—all in fulfilment of his promises to his people long ago. The past tenses in vs 51-54 most probably express what God is going to do in the future through the Messiah—actions that have already begun to take place in that the Messiah has already been conceived, and actions that are of the same kind as what God has done in the past history of Israel. This is thus a metaphorical description of the work of Jesus.”*

Deeper and Wider

1. Read Isaiah 7:13-15; 9:1-7. What roles does this Promised One fulfil?

From Isaiah 7 we learn of one who is to come who will be born of a virgin and will be called ‘Immanuel’ (God with us). See also Matthew 1:23,25).

In Isaiah 9 the crucial verses are from v6 on. The Son who is to be born will be all these things. He will be THE son of David. The eternal King on David’s throne.

These are the sorts of promises that Mary understands are being fulfilled by this baby she is carrying.

2. Read Luke 4:14-21. (Note Isaiah 61:1-2) What is Jesus claiming for himself here? How does it relate to Mary’s song?

Here Jesus takes a prophecy that is understood by the people in the Synagogue that day to be about the Messiah (the coming anointed one who will reign on David’s throne) and says “Its about me!” His words are a little more subtle but that is what he is saying.

Mary has said some similar things here particularly in regard to the disadvantaged of the world..

In regard to Luke 4 note: Morris : *“It is to be noted that Jesus ended his reading at the day of the LORD’s favour (2a). What Isaiah saw as one messianic work, the Lord Jesus divided into two: the salvific purpose of his first coming (John 3:17), and the judgmental component of his second coming (John 5:22–29; cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–10).”*

Apply

1. William Temple called this ‘a most revolutionary canticle.’ In what ways is its message revolutionary for our world.

Not the thrones, but the humble;

Not the rich, but the hungry,

The proud are scattered, the servant is helped.

Mercy to those who fear God.

All these a counter to what our world sees a the values of strength and influence.

Jesus has come to turn the world upside-down.

Bock – *“As Mary’s hymn moves from her situation to how God treats certain groups in general, her message becomes not just her own, but that of millions of others. They can enter into her praise, for they know what rejection by the world is, what being humble before God is, and maybe even what being poor is. The awareness that God is addressing the pious poor should not allow us to ignore the sociological element in*

the description. Often it is the poor who are most sensitive to God and recognize their need for him. Mary's song reveals God's character and attributes not as abstract expressions of holiness, mercy, and saving power, but in concrete relationship to people and in the detailed working of their lives."

BST – *"It cannot be denied that this saving work is one of total renewal, and indeed it looks very like social and political revolution. In the last days of British India, Jack Winslow's Christian community there was sometimes visited by CID men because of its known sympathies with Indian nationalism; William Temple accordingly warned him not to include the Magnificat in his services—'it's a most revolutionary canticle!' Now Temple spoke more truly, maybe, than he knew. For in our own day, in many parts of the world, the Magnificat and similar scriptures¹¹ are indeed the 'revolutionary canticles' which inspire, and are held to justify, Christian participation in political liberation movements. This is very upsetting for Christians in those nations which are old enough, or rich enough, to want only to be left in peace to enjoy their accustomed standard of living, and they are tempted therefore to spiritualize the Magnificat and say that it must not be used like this. But that is unfair to those of our brothers in the Third World who feel there is no answer to their problems without the overthrow of the political system. The renewal promised in the Magnificat really will involve the downfall of the rulers of this world. The question is when, and in what sense, and by what means, this will happen. "* For that we turn to the rest of Luke's gospel.

2. In this time of gift giving what does this song say to you about your commitment to the 'hungry' and the 'humble' of this world.

In large part this time of year in our culture is about gift giving (and receiving). For most of us it is the 'rich' giving to the 'rich'. It is more about 'wants' than 'needs'.

We need to think how we can reflect the values of Jesus so that we also are generous in our giving to those less fortunate than ourselves. "Anglican Aid", "TEAR fund", "World Vision" and agencies like them offer opportunities at this time of the year to do just that.

For Meditation

v53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

For Next Week: Read Luke 1:67-80

Study 2: Luke 1:67-80

The Song of Zechariah

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully.

1. Who is Zechariah? What is the context for his song?

The beginning of this story is at the beginning of the chapter. (1:5-25) Zechariah, who is 'well on in years', is a priest 'on duty' in Jerusalem when he is told, by an angel, that his wife will be having a baby and his name is to be John. John is disbelieving and is struck dumb till all this comes to fruition.

When the baby is born he 'prophesies' these words.

It is worth noting the exact words about the baby to come in 1v13 ... you are to give him the name John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. 16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

2. What do vs 68-70 tell us about the main theme of the song?

These verses introduce the main ideas and the following verses elaborate.

Note Bock: "*The psalm's main theme appears in verses 68–70, while its elaboration is the remainder of the psalm. The Lord God of Israel has once again acted on behalf of his people by visiting them and redeeming them (v. 68). As 2:26–32 makes clear, God's visitation comes with the Messiah's visitation. God "has raised up a horn" in the house of David (v. 69), through which the visit comes. Zechariah's remarks here serve as a literary elaboration of 1:31–35. The image of the horn points to the strength of the one to come, since the metaphor looks back to the strong horns of an ox that can defeat opponents (Deut. 33:17). It represents an image of war (1 Sam. 2:10; 2 Sam. 22:3). An image of battle is invoked, and the Son of David is the powerful one in the midst of the conflict. The appeal to David's house makes it clear that God is doing what the prophets promised long ago. Zechariah anticipates messianic redemption and thanks God for it.*"

Thus the themes are:

Praise to God

God's action in Redemption.

The King is coming.

God's promises are being fulfilled.

3. Which two children is the song about? What will each child do?

The two children are:

John the Baptist (v76-79)

Jesus (v68-75)(though you could argue that v78-79 are also about Jesus)

JESUS

Well what doesn't he do? But note

- He saves
- He rescues from enemies – here these are spiritual enemies.
- Shows mercy.
- Enables God's people to serve Him.
- Shines in the darkness

JOHN

- Prophet
- Prepare the way of the Lord – conjures images of Godspel for those of the right generation. Note – *Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; 4:5.*
- Teach about the way of salvation and forgiveness.
- TNTC – *“We might have expected that Zechariah’s song would be all about his little boy. He surprised us by beginning with the Messiah whom God was about to send. But he was very pleased about John, and in this part of his song he prophesies the child’s future. He addresses him directly, and says that he will be called the prophet of the Most High. There had been no prophet among the Jews for centuries, so the words should not be taken too calmly. John would represent a radical departure from what had become customary.”*

For interest it is worth comparing the two childhood summaries of these two boys in 1:80 and 2:52

Deeper and Wider

1. Read 2 Samuel 7:8-16. How does Zechariah understand this passage for his own situation?

The Samuel passage is Nathan's message to David when he has spoken of his plans to build a temple in Jerusalem. God says not it will not be David but his son but goes on to speak of a greater Son who will reign for ever on David's throne.

Zechariah recognises that the one John will 'go before' is indeed this 'great David's greater Son'. Much of the language is kingly and covenant based.

2. Look at John 8:12. Compare this to v78,79. In what way is Jesus your 'light'??

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Though the word is not used in Luke 1 the implication of 'light' is very clear.

The darkness is dispelled and the path becomes clear.

It is interesting to consider the 'light' theme in Scripture.

From the article on 'Light' in the IVP Dictionary of Biblical Imagery : *“As a symbol for God, light takes the more specific form of representing the Messiah. Isaiah’s prophecy predicted, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Is 9:2 RSV). Jesus applied this*

prophecy to himself (Mt 4:15–16). The song of Simeon calls Christ “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel” (Lk 2:32 RSV). John’s great prologue in praise of the incarnate Word repeatedly applies the mystical language of light to Christ (Jn 1:4, 5, 7, 8, 9). Christ declared himself to be “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12). Elsewhere he claimed, “I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (Jn 12:46 RSV).

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Summary. *In all of the Bible’s references to light, light is not self-generated. It comes (usually unbidden) from outside the earthly and human sphere and transforms that sphere with a transcendent splendor. As a symbol light thus pictures the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God: it is from above, but it permeates everyday life. A survey of light imagery in the Bible illustrates the implied thesis of this dictionary—that the main outline of biblical belief and the feelings it generates can be traced by following the Bible’s master images. Light in its varied meanings is at the heart of such central biblical themes as creation, providence, judgment, redemption and sanctification. It embodies much of the theological teaching of the Bible about God, which explains why light has been prominent in the history of theology (Pelikan). In its literal, physical manifestations, moreover, light contributes significantly to the elemental quality of the biblical world, keeping spiritual reality rooted in the lives that people actually live. The text within the Bible itself that comes closest to summarizing the range of meanings of light is 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (RSV). Here is the link between creation and the new creation, between OT and NT, between the physical reality and the spiritual symbol.”*

From a personal point of view we need to consider to what extent we allow the LIGHT of God to shine in our lives. I suspect all of us sometimes want to hide in the darkness a bit.

Apply

1. What example is set for us by Zechariah? (Need to look around in the rest of this chapter for this.)

Zechariah is one of those characters who makes a brief appearance in Scripture and then disappears.

He certainly has feet of clay, in the early part of the story he disbelieves God’s message and is struck dumb. BUT he remains faithful and in the 9 months he is convicted of what is right and stands for it in the matter of the child’s name. He then gives the praise to God in this magnificent song.

2. In this time of year when we think of 'salvation', 'forgiveness' and 'peace' what personal relationships do you need to think about repairing?

Jesus came to bring salvation, forgiveness and peace to the relationship between God and mankind.

And he also brings these things to our fractured relationships as we reflect his character and live a life worthy of him.

Are there people that you need to take the first step towards healing a broken relationship?

Note – *“Though our God is awesome and powerful, he uses that power in surprising ways. He sends a king who leads initially not with a sword, but with his word. He rescues not through a bloody war, but with a new way. He leads not just with might, but with light—his teaching and life. When we think of a promised king, we think of a palace and knights, the king’s army arrayed to defend his people. Jesus’ kingship does not seclude itself in a palace, nor does he have a round table. This king walked among his people and lived as they did. He was baptized by the one pointing the way to him, because life is not a function of power as the world tends to think, but is a reflection of character and light.”*

For Meditation

Vs 68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

For Next Week: Read Luke 2:1-7

Study 3: Luke 2:1-7

The Song of Jesus' Birth

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully.

EBC – *“In comparison with the complex narrative in chapter 1, the actual birth narrative of Jesus is brief. In it Luke stresses three things: (1) the political situation (to explain why Jesus' birth took place in Bethlehem); (2) that Bethlehem was the town of David (to stress Jesus' messianic claim); (3) the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth.”*

1. What was Luke's purpose in including v1-3

We tend to rush over these sorts of verses as just being 'facts' without implication.

But here Luke is locating these events in space/time history. The census was probably for taxation purposes.

And so the King of Kings is born at a place (and time) that this earthly Caesar thought he was ordering.

Bock: *“The mention of Caesar Augustus may not only be for historical background but also to contrast the human with the divine decrees. A mere Galilean peasant travels to Bethlehem ostensibly at the decree of the Roman emperor. Actually, it is in fulfillment of the divine King's plan, which, as noted passim, is reflected in Luke's frequent reference to what “must” (dei) be done.”*

2. What is emphasised about going to Bethlehem?

Note that in v4 David is mentioned twice.

David was mentioned in Zechariah's song (Study 2) and now what Zechariah had foreseen is coming to pass.

This baby that is about to be born is the fulfilment of the promises in 2 Samuel 7 that we looked at last study. This is the one who will sit on David's throne forever. And he does that by right of inheritance – Jesus is born of David's line. (Not to mention that he is indeed the King of Kings.)

3. How is this baby's birth described? What is paradoxical about all of this?

It is all very matter of fact is it not? Though I am sure it was not for Joseph and Mary.

And all very humble.

The paradox.

There was a Christmas card around a few years ago which had as its headline 'Kid Born in Shed Saves World'. And of course that is the paradox here. In that manger (feed box) in the animal shelter a baby is born who is in fact the creator of all that is around him and the entire universe. The one refused a room in the inn is the Lord of Glory.

Bock: *“In the ancient world, if anyone had asked if there was a more important person than Caesar, the emperor and ruler of the vast Roman empire, the answer surely would have been no. Yet it is the birth of a little boy in a rural Judean village that causes the angels to*

launch into praise. The circumstances of Jesus' birth are so basic and humble in origin that it is hard to appreciate just who it is that is born here. Most regal figures are born with great ceremony and celebration. But Jesus' birth is as average as it comes. His birthplace is determined in part by the need to fill out a census—probably a means to register for paying taxes.¹ The journeying of everyone “to his own town to register” appears to be a sensitive decision by the Romans that allowed the Jews to follow their own custom of going to one's ancestral home.² So Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem, a place identified as “the town of David,” because of Joseph's lineage in the family. Mary, who did not have to go, goes anyway, possibly because Joseph wants to be present at the birth of her child, soon to happen.”

Deeper and Wider

1. Read Micah 5:2. Who decided that Joseph and Mary needed to go to Bethlehem at this crucial time?

Micah 5:2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

The administrative needs of the vast Roman Empire had dictated the need to count and register people most probably so the tax system could be regulated. So people all over the Empire have to go to register. What power Caesar had!

BUT we know the God of Israel had foreordained this so that the Messiah he was sending would be born in Bethlehem.

God Rules.

2. Read Matthew 1:18-2:1. What does Matthew's account add to what we should know about Jesus' birth?

Matthew has a different perspective. It is worth building the picture of this momentous event from both accounts.

Apply.

1. On that uncomfortable night in Bethlehem what do you think it was that sustained Joseph and Mary? What example is this for us as we celebrate Christmas as families?

Birth pangs, end of a long journey, no accommodation, first child, long way from home, 'rustic' surroundings. It doesn't sound like a lot of fun. However, I am sure that Joseph and Mary were sustained by precisely the thoughts that were expressed in Mary's Song (Study 1). Perhaps Mary even repeated those words to reassure her anxious husband. The comfort is that Jesus is the coming saviour, the one who has come to save, and forgive, and 'be there' for his people.

EBC – “*Luke does not seem to be portraying a dismal situation with an unfeeling innkeeper as villain. Rather, he is establishing a contrast between the proper rights of the Messiah in his own “town of David” and the very ordinary and humble circumstances of his birth. Whatever the reason, even in his birth Jesus was excluded from the normal shelter others enjoyed (cf. 9:58). This is consistent with Luke's realistic presentation of Jesus' humanity and servanthood.*”

As we gather this Christmas in what are probably much more salubrious surroundings we should have the same focus – JESUS.

From the Life Application Bible : “*Sometimes we think to ourselves, “I'm*

being obedient, so why aren't things going better?" We face discomfort or inconvenience and immediately think either that we have misread God's will or that God has made a mistake. But watch this quiet couple as they head toward Bethlehem. God did not soften Joseph's bumpy road, but strengthened him. God did not provide a luxurious inn for Joseph and Mary, but brought his Son into the world in humble surroundings. When we do God's will, we are not guaranteed comfort and convenience. But we are promised that everything, even discomfort and inconvenience, has meaning in God's plan. He will guide you and provide all you need. Like Joseph, live each day by faith, trusting that God is in charge."

Bock – "THE BIRTH OF Jesus is a lesson in God's faithfulness, but it also reveals God's heart and character. For God identifies with the human race, and this birth reflects such identification. The most humble birth for the most exalted figure ever born shows that the key values of life are found in the life itself, not in the accoutrements that come with life."

2. Consider Philippians 2:5-11. What is this telling us about Jesus' birth and what it means for us?

This magnificent passage from Philippians reminds us of the 'theological' significance of what is happening in that stable.

This is God come down – come down to die that we might be forgiven and LIVE.

Bock (on the Luke passage) – "Perhaps after almost two thousand years of publicity about Jesus, the church takes the amazing involvement of God with us for granted. The world certainly rarely takes the time to really look and see what Jesus is all about. Usually it never gets past the story about the baby Jesus. Is that the church's fault for failing to engage the world? Is the world too busy to stop and notice or too distracted by other appeals? Is it both? If the world does stop and look, it often sees Jesus as one teacher among many. But the teaching of the heavenly host rules out such a limiting view of Jesus. He is the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. He is no longer in a crib and no longer confined to a manger. He is now seated at the right hand of God, aware of what we do and say (Luke 22:69). Who the baby Jesus was is nothing compared to who he is. His birth and the testimony surrounding it tell us he was a special child. But his life, ministry, and resurrection secure the fact that he is unique. No wonder Mary pondered all these things in her heart, as even we should today. But she has seen nothing yet, and neither have we. God has only just begun to reveal his story of his involvement with us through Jesus. The story of Jesus' birth does not end with him wrapped in swaddling clothes. Often the beauty of the Christmas story gets treated as if it were the whole story about Jesus—God showing himself in the birth of a special child. But this story is only the beginning of God's new work. That labor has continued century after century in fresh generations of believers who have shared in the blessing of relationship he provides. As believers we belong to a great train of witnesses spanning the ages, who have lifted their voices and offered their souls in gratitude for what this birth meant. One day in heaven, face to face with men and women of every generation and nation, we will offer thanks before him. There is nothing wrong with getting a little practice now!"

Study 4: Luke 3:1-6

The Song of John the Baptist

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully.

1. When did all this happen? Why the detail? Who is 'timing' all this?
 We have now skipped forward some thirty years.
 The detail again locates the story in definite space/time history.
 All this rulers and 'great ones' names are mentioned but they are not the focus. The focus here is one 'John son of Zechariah' who hears the word of God.
 Note the beginning of v4 –'As it is written ...' it is the Lord God who is bringing all these things to pass in His good time.
 EBC- *"The dating provided in this verse was more immediately useful to Luke's first-century readers than to the average reader today who does not know the period when Luke was writing. If the reign of Tiberius was dated from the occasion of his predecessor's death (Augustus died on 19 August A.D. 14), his "fifteenth year" would be from August, A.D. 28, to August, A.D. 29, according to the normal Roman method of reckoning."*

2. What was John the Baptist's message?
 First he is preaching repentance and forgiveness as this is evidenced in his hearers through baptism. This is what John's father, Zechariah, spoke of in 1:77.
 TNTC – *"Baptism was a rite of cleansing in a number of religions. It seems certain that at this time the Jews used proselyte baptism, a ceremony to cleanse converts from the defilement they saw as characteristic of all Gentiles. The sting in John's practice was that he applied to Jews the ceremony they regarded as suitable for unclean Gentiles. John denounces those who expected that in the judgment God would deal hardly with Gentile sinners, but that the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, would be safe. He removes this fancied security."*
 Second, in fulfilment of Isaiah 40, John is preparing the way for another who is to come see v16ff.
 (And there is some advice about road building.)
 Bock – *"John preaches in the manner of the Old Testament prophets, seeking for a "turning" of the heart. Though the Greek word for "repentance" (metanoia) means "a change of mind," the concept of repentance has Old Testament roots in the idea of turning to God (1 Kings 8:47; 2 Kings 23:25; Ps. 78:34; Isa. 6:10; Ezek. 3:19; Amos 4:6, 8; cf. Jesus' comments in Luke 24:43–47, where the Old Testament and repentance are linked). To be prepared for God's salvation, one's heart must be opened to his message."*

3. Where does Luke see John fitting into God's plan?

Luke gives John much greater prominence than the other gospels. This is particularly shown by the time spent around the story of John's miraculous birth in chapter 1.

Luke also goes on to give a much fuller account of John's ministry and preaching.

I believe that among the things Luke is doing here is he uses John (who is probably the last Old Testament style prophet but one who has one foot in the New Testament) to tie the Old Testament with Jesus.

John is also an example of one who proclaims Jesus and his message. NBC *"John was both the fulfiller of prophecy and also the last of the pre-Christian prophets. He is therefore described in the same way as an OT prophet (cf. vs 1-2 with Je. 1:1-2). His coming fulfilled Is. 40:3-5, and his special task was to proclaim a religious ceremony of washing which pledged the forgiveness of sins."*

Deeper and Wider

1. Read Isaiah 40:1-31. This gives the context for this message about John.

What is Isaiah saying about the LORD and his purposes?

A long passage I know but one of my favourite passages of Scripture and surely one of the greatest pieces of poetry of all time.

At this point in Isaiah's prophecy the tone changes from basically judgment to a very strong note of hope – v1 "Comfort, comfort my people ..."

Isaiah is saying that there is more to come; God has not forgotten his people. The God who is the creator and Lord presented in Isaiah 40 will continue to act to bring people to himself.

EBC – *"For Luke, as for Matthew and Mark, the Isaiah passage was a clear prophecy of the ministry of John the Baptist. Luke includes more of the quotation than Matthew and Mark do. First he cites the extraordinary way in which, on the analogy of preparations made for a royal visitor, even the seemingly immovable must be removed to make way for the Lord (vv.45). What needs removal is the sin of the people."*

2. Read Luke 3:7-20. What does John preach and what is the response?

John preaches the Old Testament moral code. He urges the Jews to live as God's people should.

Some believe and are baptised.

Some ask who is this man ... is he the Messiah? (Note John's reply and John 3:30)

Apply

1. How is John the Baptist a model for us as we speak about salvation through Jesus?

We might not all want to live John's lifestyle (see Matthew 3:4) or be as confrontational in style as John but his way of going about things has a lot to commend it.

He is forthright – he does not 'beat around the bush' but tells it like it is. He speaks the truth, issues a challenge and then invites a positive response.

And last of all he points clearly to Jesus and not to himself.

2. How will 'all mankind see God's salvation'?

This is a quote from Isaiah 40:5 (sort of).

Mankind will see salvation some three years later than this (and 33 years after Jesus' birth) when the one John is pointing to is nailed to and then raised up on a cross to die a substitutionary death for all mankind.

Mankind sees God's salvation in Jesus. They see that salvation in 21st century Kiama by OUR preaching/speaking/living of the gospel.

The Life Application Study Bible says : "3:6 This book was written to a non-Jewish audience. Luke quoted from Isaiah to show that salvation is for "all people," not just the Jews (Isaiah 40:3-5; 52:10). John the Baptist called everyone to prepare to meet Jesus. That includes you, no matter what your nationality, social standing, religious affiliation, or political position. God is calling to all people. Don't let feelings of being an outsider cause you to hold back. No one who wants to follow Jesus is an outsider in God's Kingdom."

For Meditation

Vs 6 "And all mankind will see God's salvation.

To follow up: Read Luke's Gospel right through.