



"This is the Story..."

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## **Week 52: This is the story, this is the celebration**

Luke 1:67-79 (Zechariah's song)

### **Intro Video: COMING SOON!**

**Review the big story:** God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. All of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family to be a blessing to the whole earth. Like the humans before them, the generations of this family often missed the mark, but God was faithful.

When the people became slaves, God raised up Moses to be their leader and delivered them. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God's provision, living out God's commandments, and with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the shema, words of love to keep with their whole beings. God brought the people into the promised land. They continued to miss the mark, and God sent judges to guide them.

God raised up prophets, but the people demanded a king. Kings continued to miss the mark. The kingdom divided into the north and south. God stuck with the people through leaders and prophets, and continued to call the people back to God, even as first the northern, and then the southern kingdom fell to invading powers. Some of the people were sent into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the kingdom. Through prophets and everyday people, God continued to stick with the scattered people and to reveal that God is so much bigger than they imagined. The people were finally able to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple.

The people of God began to wait for a Messiah. This Messiah was announced through an angel to Mary. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and there, Jesus was born, proclaimed by angels, visited by shepherds, blessed by Simeon and Anna, and sought by magi. When Jesus's life was in danger, his parents fled with him to Egypt, where they remained as refugees until it was safe for them to return and settle in Nazareth. When he was ready to begin his ministry, Jesus was baptized by his cousin John. Jesus called a community of people to follow him.

Jesus showed people what life inside the blessing looks like. He fulfilled the scriptures, walked on water, fed people, welcomed children, told stories, and showed us what was most important.

Jesus entered Jerusalem and was proclaimed as the Messiah. He angered people with his teachings. He was arrested and killed. The people had really missed the mark. But God stuck with them. God's love is stronger than death. Jesus rose again. He walked, ate and talked with his friends. Then he ascended to heaven and told his disciples that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost. They told people about Jesus, and many people believed and were baptized. They lived in shalom community and followed Jesus, even when that meant persecution. One of the people who persecuted the people of the Way, Saul, had a dramatic experience and began to share the good news of Jesus. Through relationships and divine revelation, the early church began to be welcoming of all people. Paul, Peter and others traveled all over the known world to share the gospel, and people like Lydia became leaders in new faith communities. Early followers of Jesus continued to figure out how to be the church, facing challenges that included persecution. Prophets and leaders continued to encourage the people and to point them toward life inside the blessing.

**Key verse:** Luke 1:78-79

**Tell the story:** We end our series with a canticle. When John the Baptist was born, his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied these words. It's the song Zechariah sang when his heart was full. Our year-long story experience isn't going to end with wrapping up the Bible and saying, "That's done!" God's story continues. This is the story of how it all began, but there is no ending to it. You continue the story. This week's scripture is a benediction of sorts, a blessing on you as you continue the story. And as we read Zechariah's song, we can be inspired to sing the story ourselves.

- Read Luke 1:67-79

**Prime the pump:**

- **Things to notice:**
  - This isn't the first "song" we have read in "This is the Story..." Can you remember some of the other ones? They are sprinkled throughout the series...Read 10:12. What Genesis story does this remind you of?
  - Verse 67 says Zechariah was "filled with the Holy Spirit." Where have we heard that phrase recently?
  - Notice that there are two distinct parts to this song. A big proclamation (vs 68-75), then a specific blessing (vs 76-79). Try reading it dramatically, with a shift at that spot, and see what new things you notice.
- **Background information:**
  - This passage is commonly called the "Benedictus." The name comes from the first couple of words, "Blessed be." It has been an important part of worship for many Christians, including Anabaptists, throughout the centuries. For a contemporary Anabaptist take on the passage, check out this article by Mary Shertz (<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/sunday-november-21-2010>).
  - The NRSV translates verse 69 to say "mighty savior." The word means more literally "horn of salvation." This ties to Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2, David's song in 2 Samuel 22, and many other Hebrew Bible songs. The horn is a sign of power.
  - Most of Zechariah's song quotes and references Jewish scriptures. If you're intrigued, get out your study Bible and start looking them up!
- **Conversation starters:**
  - Look around in Luke 1 and 2. There are a lot of canticles, or songs, packed into these two chapters. Why do you think this is?
  - Zechariah's song is a combination of remembering the story, remembering God's work, and proclaiming the future story of God. He sang it when his heart was full to bursting. Have you ever been so full you needed to proclaim like this? If you had a canticle, what would it include? If you're inspired, write your own.
  - There are many words of comfort and inspiration in this passage. Try saying Zechariah's song (or parts of it) daily and notice how it shapes you. You may also want to try dancing to it, painting it, or doing something else inspired by it.

**Microsong:** "This is the story, this is the celebration" (Listen: <https://youtu.be/BKLEFpIDfSg>)

This is the story, this is the celebration. God visited God's people and brought their liberation. Out of the hands of the people who hate them, a dawn from on high to shine on those in darkness.

That's all of us who miss the mark, all of us who breathe, all of us with heartbeats, all of us who need . . . all things new. God makes all things new, all things new. You make all things new. (This is the story, this is the celebration)

**Sing the big song:** (Listen: <https://youtu.be/9TPFe-wvpHs>)

This is the story of how it all began. God made matter, and chaos shattered.  
Eve and Adam, they tried to hide. The world got violent and God replied with a mark and a flood and  
a rainbow sign, God's love written on skin and sky,  
*And then God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, oh ohhhh*  
A mother and her favorite son wrestle for the blessing, another son becomes a slave, the land is  
saved from famine.  
God's family grows. Egypt oppresses. They groan to God and God sends Moses.  
*Ten strange signs say "Please release them!" By the sea God saves them. Oh ohhh.*  
The people complain and God rains bread. Daily food and ten new rules.  
Five sisters come and ask for land. God says "Yes, amend the law!"  
*Moses says, "In your new life across the Jordan, love God with your whole heart and with all your  
being, and your strength, now listen: God is One, only God! God is One, only God!"*  
Cross over Jordan, stories and stones. Circuits and shouts and the walls come down.  
God sends judges like Deborah and the land has rest.  
Ruth's worth more than seven sons; Redeem the lost with steadfast love.  
Corruption in the temple then God sends Samuel.  
God gives them a prophet, they ask for a king. Does God need a temple? A wise king forgets. And  
when a bully rules the land, the nation tears apart and loses David's heart...  
A widow's gift and a prophet's cry. God brings life in desperate times.  
Josiah reads this misplaced scroll. He turns to God wholeheartedly like David did. In his time.  
God gives Jeremiah a picture of God's ruined family...  
Is there any hope left, is there any hope left, is there any hope left for you, Jerusalem?  
Any hope? Any hope left? Is there any hope left for you?  
By the streams of Babylon, how can we sing when you are gone, Jerusalem...  
I'm in a valley of human bones. These bones are Israel, God's breath is hope.  
Haman plans death for Esther's exiles. She risks her life so they might survive.  
Finally God's family rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem. God plunges them into a sea of joy and  
celebration of Only God. God is One, Only God.  
Comfort to Jerusalem, your warfare finally ceases.  
Matthew lists these generations, Abraham to Jesus  
The angel says, "You'll have a son and God will give him David's throne." Mary says, "God looked at  
me, now I'm the luckiest person around.  
Mary, now a pregnant fiancé, makes a grueling journey.  
She has her baby, shepherds see angels declaring God's glory and peace among people.  
The Spirit sends shepherds and elders and prophets to tell those who wait their Messiah has come.  
Herod gets nervous, the Magi find Jesus. They hide their discovery and hurry back home...  
Once again an angel comes to Joseph -- so they make good their escape, ooh.  
Jesus in the temple, astonishing the crowd. Jesus with his parents. Jesus growing up.  
Down by the Jordan with the prophet John, Jesus asks to be baptized. And the skies are opened. A  
dove descends. A voice from heaven says, "This is my son, the son I love. I'm pleased with him."  
Jesus calls disciples to be with him in the work he's doing. Ohhh oohhh.  
Jesus teaches the disciples "This is life inside the blessing: You're blessed, you who are empty.  
You're blessed all you who mourn. You're blessed, you who ache for God, whose inner life is  
pure. This is life inside the blessing."  
Jesus walks on the water. Peter tries and begins to sink. Jesus grabs his hand and the wind dies  
down.  
Jesus sees the crowds with compassion. So he teaches them for days and days. The people are  
hungry. There's baskets left over and no one left out.  
People bring their children to Jesus. Jesus blesses them and says, "You must accept God's good  
government like a little child would or you won't get in at all" This is life inside the blessing. Ooh  
ooh.

What's most important? Love God with everything and love your neighbor, whoever that may be. Jesus tells Martha, "You're upset about many things; Just one thing's essential; it's what Mary's choosing here." (Life inside the blessing. Life inside the blessing.)

Save now, David's son rides on a donkey. He will judge nations, separate the sheep from goats. In the garden Jesus prays, "Yes, father, if there's no other way." Jesus dies. The veil rips. . . "Surely this was God's kid."

Mary is crying, the tomb is empty. Jesus meets her and speaks her name. Jesus appears to many of his close friends, breaks bread with them, shows them his scarred hands. While he blesses them he's carried up to heaven after he asks them to wait in Jerusalem.

Together in one place, sound of wind and tongues of fire. The place where they're praying's shaken and everyone's filled with God's breath. They have one heart and soul and no one claims for themselves alone what they own.

Stephen sees Jesus and asks him not to charge his killers with their sin, with their sin.

Saul is traveling. A light shines all around, he hears a voice calling his name. In a vision God tells Ananias to go and pray for Saul. When he prays something like scales fall and Saul's no longer blind.

Peter is praying. The sky is opened and a sheet comes down with unclean food. Peter is wondering what all this means when an invitation comes. God's Spirit is poured out beyond the boundaries of God's family.

Outside the city God opens Lydia's heart, she and her family are baptized. In that same city Paul tells a spirit to come out of someone who's a slave. That spirit leaves the girl and with it go the slavers' future profits. The slave owners lie to get Paul and Silas jailed

Close to midnight an earthquake shakes the jail's foundation. Doors open wide but Silas and Paul stay to help their jailer to find God's salvation.

This is the story of how it all began. The former things have passed away and God makes all things new.

This is the story, this is the celebration, God visits the people and brings their liberation. God makes all things new.

*God loves every one of us, it's true. God loves every one of us, it's true. And God loves the universe.*

**Go do your household project!**