

Summary Handout

“My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord”

Lesson

2

Summary

Luke 1; Matthew 1; Gabriel promises Zacharias that Elisabeth shall bear a son, whom they shall name John—He also tells Mary she shall be the mother of the Son of God—Mary visits Elisabeth and utters a Psalm of praise—John the Baptist is born—Zacharias prophesies of John’s mission. Christ is born of Mary—She conceives by the power of the Holy Ghost—Our Lord is named Jesus.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights: **Luke Has Perfect Understanding:** He gives us a key about trusting the witnesses of Apostles and Prophets. “It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first . . .” (*Luke 1:3*) The Apostle Luke was Paul’s scribe and wrote two books of the New Testament, Luke and Acts. “Luke, the beloved physician and missionary associate of Paul, first wrote his Gospel, telling of our Lord’s mortal ministry, and second this book of Acts, which summarizes portions of the ministries of Peter and Paul. Both accounts are addressed to Theophilus, a prominent personage of the period, who, since Luke’s writings are addressed to Gentile or Roman readers, may have been a distinguished citizen of Rome.” (*Bruce R. McConkie, Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol.2, p.21*)

Witnesses Before Jesus’ Death. Another witness, John the Baptist, preceded Jesus. Zacharias, the father of John, was a priest in the temple when he received a remarkable vision. It parallels the Abraham/Sarah scenario of having a child at an advanced age. Later, like other holy martyrs, both Zacharias and his son John were killed by a wicked generation and a priesthood (or priestcraft) that existed among righteous priestly men and women who anticipated the impending arrival of the Messiah. “That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.” (*Matthew 23:35*)

Prophets Murdered: “When Herod’s edict went forth to destroy the young children, John was about six months older than Jesus, and came under this hellish edict, and Zacharias caused his mother to take him into the mountains, where he was raised on locusts and wild honey. When his father refused to disclose his hiding place, and being the officiating high priest at the Temple that year, was slain by Herod’s order, between the porch and the altar, as Jesus said. John’s head was taken to Herod, the son of this infant murderer, in a charger -- notwithstanding there was never a greater prophet born of a woman than him!” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Five 1842-43 p.261*)

Small Righteous Priesthood Branch Continued: Many Jewish traditions, including clothes and manner of worship that are still used today, reflect temple functions of that time. They are familiar to Latter-day Saints because the symbols in the temple are eternal signs and tokens. In Zacharias’ time, they observed the same practices we use today. In the Old Testament Supplemental manual, we have previously discussed temple symbols in Jewish worship such as clothing, robe, sash, apron, shoes removed, and men separated from women in special worship environment. “The authority of the priesthood was manifest in the days of the Savior’s coming. By virtue of the priesthood held by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, the angel appeared to him. Simeon, the prophet, blessed the infant Jesus, and the scriptures say that Simeon was filled with the Holy Ghost. So there were a few still remaining who had faith and the power of the priesthood.” (*Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.3, p.86*)

All Ordinances are Eternal: “. . . For our own part we cannot believe that the ancients in all ages were so ignorant of the system of heaven as many suppose, since all that were ever saved, were saved through the power of this great plan of redemption, as much before the coming of Christ as since; if not, God has had different plans in operation (if we may so express it), to bring men back to dwell with Himself; and this we cannot believe, since there has been no change in the constitution of man since he fell; and the ordinance or institution of offering blood in sacrifice, was only designed to be performed till Christ was offered up and shed His blood -- as said before -- that man might look forward in faith to that time. It will be noticed that, according to Paul, (see Gal. 3:8) the Gospel was preached to Abraham. We would like to be informed in what name the Gospel was then preached, whether it was in the name of Christ or some other name. If in any other name, was it the Gospel? And if it was the Gospel, and that preached in the name of Christ, had it any ordinances? If not, was it the Gospel? And if it has ordinances what were they? . . . From these few facts, we conclude that whenever the Lord revealed Himself to men in ancient days, and commanded them to offer sacrifice to Him, that it

was done that they might look forward in faith to the time of His coming, and rely upon the power of that atonement for a remission of their sins. And this they have done, thousands who have gone before us, whose garments are spotless, and who are, like Job, waiting with an assurance like his, that they will see Him in the latter day upon the earth, even in their flesh. . . . We may conclude, that though there were different dispensations, yet all things which God communicated to His people were calculated to draw their minds to the great object, and to teach them to rely upon God alone as the author of their salvation . . .” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Two 1834-37 p.59-60*)

Zacharias, Elisabeth, John the Baptist Lived in Judah: “Being priests, they likely lived in a town that was disciplined by priestly rules of cleanliness. “. . . there were 48 Levitical cities which were traditionally set apart, usually four from every tribe, for the exclusive residence of the Levites. Included in these were the six cities of refuge.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) “. . . and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda . . .” (*Luke 1:39-63*)

Yatta, Utah? Ein Kerem in the fertile watershed hills just outside Jerusalem is the traditional birthplace of John. However, another small Arab town named Yatta, just outside the hills of Hebron may be a more likely location for their residence. It is farther from Jerusalem and seems a more likely place to hide than Ein Kerem. As mentioned in a previous Old Testament lesson supplement, that town’s name, Yatta, may be a derivation of the word Judah. It also has an archaeological ruin of an ancient “Levite” synagogue. It is tempting to give archaeology, plus a written account of “City of Juda,” a little more credence than just tradition. With a linguistic twist we could say that John came from Utah! Utah means “tops of the mountains” and Judah is in the tops of the mountains of Israel. John from Judah preceded the era of the Savior’s first coming. Prophets from Utah are preceding the era of the Savior’s second coming.

Revealing His and The Lord’s Identity: John knew who he was and surely knew who the Savior was. Like all prophets, he bore witness of the Lord and desired to bring people to Him. “Why did John send two of his disciples to Jesus to ask if he were the promised Messiah? (Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 7:19-23) Any inference that the Baptist was uncertain or doubtful in his own mind, as to the identity and mission of the Master, is totally unwarranted. In reality, the imprisoned Elias and forerunner of our Lord was using this means to persuade his disciples to forsake him and follow Jesus.” (*Bruce R. McConkie, Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol.1, p.251*)

A Greater Prophet: “There is not a prophet who has borne greater or more important testimony of Jesus than that which fell from John's lips. (Luke 7:28) Joseph Smith gave three reasons why John was considered one of the greatest prophets. First, he was entrusted with a divine mission of preparing the way before the face of the Lord. Whoever had such a trust committed to him before or since? No man. Secondly he was entrusted with the important mission, and it was required at his hands, to baptize the Son of Man. Whoever had the honor of doing that? Whoever had so great a privilege and glory? Whoever led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, and had the privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove, or rather in the sign of the dove, in witness of that administration? Thirdly, John, at that time was the only legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom there was then on earth. And holding the keys of power, the Jews had to obey his instructions or be damned, by their own law; and Christ himself fulfilled all righteousness in becoming obedient to the law which he had given to Moses on the mount, and thereby magnified it and made it honorable, instead of destroying it. The son of Zacharias wrested the keys, the kingdom, the power, the glory from the Jews, by the holy anointing and decree of heaven, and these three reasons constitute him the greatest prophet born of woman. (Teachings, pp. 275-276.)” (*Bruce R. McConkie, Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol.1, p.262 - p.263*)

Turn Means Repent: In this lesson, the word “turn” is emphasized (Luke 1:16-17). In Hebrew the word “turn” is the same word as repent, hence “men turn to God” and sometimes the term is used that “God repents.” Actually, it is His turning to man as man turns to Him, giving a great symbolism to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers.”

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