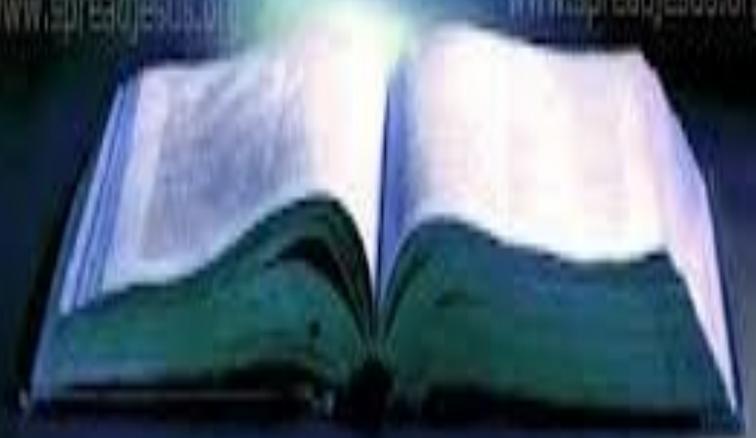


CHAPTER 1: 56-80

The Gospel of Luke

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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Luke's gospel is a compilation of various interviews with eye-witnesses and close followers of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). The author, Luke, probably did not become a Christian until several years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is first mentioned (implicitly) in Acts 16:10 (Acts is another book of the New Testament which Luke wrote). He did not, therefore, meet Jesus in the flesh and he himself was not an eye-witness.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Continuation of Luke 1: 56-80

Ver. 56.—*And Mary abode with her about three months, &c* She ministered to Elizabeth her kinswoman, refreshing her with her holy ministrations and conversation, and sanctifying her, and John likewise. So S. Ambrose says, "It was not only for the sake of friendship that she abode so long, but for the advancement also of so great a prophet; for if at her first coming the child had advanced so far that at the salutation of Mary he leaped in the womb, and his mother was filled with the Holy Spirit, how much may we suppose that the presence of the holy Mary added during so long a time?" So also Origen (*Hom. 9*) shows that during these three months, owing to the presence of the Virgin both John and Elizabeth made wonderful progress in holiness.

There is a question here whether the Blessed Virgin remained until the nativity of John. Theophylact, Euthymius, Jansenius maintain that she did not.

* Elias is written by error for Andrew, and many, if not all his editors, have followed à Lapide. The passage referred to is found in the sermon of Andrew of Crete on the Annunciation.

They prove this—1. because the Blessed Virgin came in the sixth month, and remained, as it were, three months (*Vulg. quasi tres menses*), therefore she departed before the ninth month was completed, and therefore before Elizabeth gave birth to the child; 2. because after the departure of the Virgin, S. Luke relates the birth of the child, without making any mention of the Virgin; 3. and chiefly, because it was not fitting that the Virgin should be present at the birth; 4. because it was proper that she should avoid the crowd which would gather together at the birth.

The contrary opinion is equally, and even more, probable; and is maintained by Origen, S. Ambrose, &c.—1. because it would have been discourteous to remain up to the birth and leave immediately before it; 2. because at the time of the birth Elizabeth most needed the presence, help, and consolation of the Virgin; 3. because the Virgin remained three months for this very purpose, that she might behold, embrace, and bless John, the wonder of the world, and the forerunner of Christ, and on the other hand that John when born might behold and venerate the mother of the Lord, and Christ the Lord in her. Whence Bede says, “Mary remained until, Elizabeth’s full time having come, she saw the nativity of the forerunner of her Lord, on account of whom chiefly she had come.”

And she returned to her own house. To Nazareth. This house of the Virgin was translated by angels to Loretto, as I have said before.

Ver. 57.—*And Elizabeth’s full time came*, &c. S. Luke adds the account of Elizabeth’s bringing forth to that of the visitation of the Blessed Virgin, as an effect to a cause. For the Blessed Virgin by her prayers and merits obtained for John both his nativity and his sanctification; for this purpose she had come from Nazareth and had remained with her for three months.

And she brought forth a son. John the Baptist on June 24th; for then the Church keeps the yearly celebration of his birth, observing it in his case alone, as it does also in the case of Christ. For as regards the rest of the Saints the Church celebrates not the day of their birth, but that of their death on which they passed from a life of misery to one of blessedness.

Ver. 58.—*And her neighbours*, &c. So was fulfilled the promise of the Angel (*v. 14*), *Many shall rejoice at his birth*. Truly as S. Ambrose says, “The bringing forth of the Saints causes the rejoicing of many, for it is a common blessing; for justice is a public virtue.” For the just by their example benefit all; many also, as John did, benefit them by their preaching

Ver. 59.—*They came*. That is, the priests and relations whose office it was to perform the rite of circumcision.

To circumcise. Notice here that the Jews were not always circumcised in the synagogue. For that John was circumcised at home is inferred from the

following verse, in which it is clearly implied that his mother was present, who could not at that time according to the law (Lev. xii. 4) leave the house.

Also by circumcision an infant was purged from original sin, and united to the church, or company of the faithful, whence at that time the name of some faithful person, especially of the father, grandfather, or some relation was given to the infant, as is now done in baptism.

Ver. 60.—*And his mother*, &c. Elizabeth, who on the salutation of the Virgin, being filled with the Holy Ghost, had learned the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, learned also the name of her son not from Zacharias but from the Holy Spirit, and all the other things that had happened to Zacharias in the temple when he was burning incense. For as S. Ambrose says, “She could not be ignorant of the Forerunner of the Lord who had prophesied of Christ.”

Ver. 61.—*And they said, There is none of thy kindred*, &c. This is an earthly custom, but John was a citizen of heaven, not of the earth; whence he received from heaven a celestial name. “Observe,” as S. Ambrose and Bede say, “that the name belongs not to the family, but to the prophet.”

Ver. 62.—*They made signs*, &c. Lest perchance the mother had made a mistake in assigning the name, they refer to the father, to whom both the infant and the giving of a name to the infant belonged. *They made signs*; “because,” says S. Ambrose, “his unbelief had deprived him of speech and hearing, they question him by signs.”

Ver. 63.—*His name is John*. S. Ambrose remarks that it is said his name *is*, not *will be*; so that the meaning is, we do not give a name to him who has received one from God, “he has his own name, which we acknowledge, but which we did not choose.” Names were frequently given from some event either present or future; thus Isaac received his name from the laughter of his mother; Cain because he was the possession of his mother Eve; Moses because he was drawn out of the water, &c.; so also John received his name from the grace and mercy which he received, not in his conception, but when he was visited by the Blessed Virgin.

And they all wondered, both at the agreement between the father and mother, and at the name, which was an unknown one in the family; for they did not know that it had been revealed from heaven to Zacharias.

Ver. 64.—*And his mouth*, &c. That is, he began to speak. S. Ambrose says, “Rightly from that moment was his tongue loosed, for that which unbelief had bound faith set free.” When he saw John really born, he believed the promise made to him by the angel concerning him. John therefore, as he had filled his mother when in her womb with the Holy Spirit, so now when born breathed the same spirit upon his father. Whence S. Gregory Nazianzen says, “The birth of John broke the silence of Zacharias; for it were unreasonable, when the voice of the Word had come forth, that the father should remain speechless.”

to Christ above all exception; for in the desert he could have been taught by no man, but only by God and the angels. Wherefore he was taught of God *θεοδίδακτος*. John therefore in the desert was an inhabitant of heaven, both because he had the heaven for a home and a roof, and because by continually contemplating heaven, he in mind dwelt in heaven, and emulated the life of those who dwell in heaven.

Gregory Nazianzen (*in orat. 20 in praise of S. Basil*) calls John the highest Philosopher; “Basil,” he says, “retired hence with us to Pontus, and ruled over the schools of piety which were in those parts, and with Elias and John, the greatest philosophers, embraces solitude.” Elias of Crete, commenting on *orat. 1 of S. Gregory*, gives another reason for the solitary life of John; “Since Christ and John were relations, therefore lest John might seem to bear witness to Christ because of his relationship to Him, it was brought about by the grace of the Holy Spirit that he should lead a solitary life during the whole period of his early years, that he might not seem to give this testimony (to Christ) through friendship or through some kind of artifice, but that he might announce the very fact as if he had learnt it from God; and therefore he said: I knew Him not; but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, ‘Upon Whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending like a dove, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.’”

Symbolically, Nicetas (*in orat. 38 on S. Greg. Nazianzen*), says, “John is a figure of those who are sanctified from childhood, and by going onwards to the end preserve a most pious and constant habit of virtue. For when as yet he was in his mother’s womb, he recognised his Lord, and leapt with great joy.”

Lastly, the same S. Gregory Nazianzen, following the example of S. John, retired with S. Basil into solitude, the spiritual delights and fruits of which he thus describes (*orat. 1*):—“Nothing seemed to me so much to be desired by any one as that a man should lead a life superior to those things which we behold with our bodily eyes, with closed senses placed where he is free from the desires of the flesh and the world, and, except as far as necessity requires, coming into contact with no human things, and holding converse with himself and with God. Such a man ever bears about in himself visions of Divine purity, unmingled with any earthly and delusive forms; and he is altogether a pure mirror of the things of God and of Divine things, and receives light by means of light (that is to say, a clearer light by means of that which is less clear), and already in hope beholds the blessedness of the future life, and holds converse with the angels, and though still on earth he leaves earth behind, and is placed on high by the Spirit.” Wherefore the Fathers speak everywhere of John as a prince of the monastic life, of which Christ was the Leader; as I have shewn, S. Matt. iv. 1.

beatific peace in heaven; according to Isaiah xxxii. 17. *And the work of righteousness shall be peace, . . . and my people shall dwell in the beauty of peace, and in sure dwellings*; for by peace the Hebrews signify every blessing, and eternal felicity and beatitude itself. Hence Christ is called by Isaiah (iv- 6), *The Prince of peace and the Father of the coming age*; and he adds, *of peace there shall be no end*.

Ver. 80.—*And the child grew, &c.* As John grew in body, so also he waxed strong in spirit, because the Holy Spirit from day to day filled him with greater wisdom, grace, and strength. Hence we conclude that the use of reason, which was bestowed upon John in the womb, continued after his nativity and increased. So Theophylact says, “The more the child grew, the more the powers of the Spirit were manifested in him, being an organ capable of receiving them.” And Titus says, “according to the proportion and increase of his age, he advanced in grace and spirit.” The same is said of the child Jesus, but after a different manner and sense.

And was in the deserts. Hence we conclude that John from a boy retired into the desert, and there remained till his thirtieth year, when he began to show himself to the people, and to preach repentance to them, and faith in Christ.

Baronius is of opinion that this retirement and flight of John into the desert took place through fear of the infanticide Herod; for although John was not living in the coasts of Bethlehem, yet on account of the fame of his wonderful nativity the fear and anger of Herod extended to him; for fearing that he was the king of the Jews, *i.e.* the Messiah, whom the Magi were asking for, he commanded him to be killed. Wherefore, that he might not be murdered by Herod, he was taken away by his mother when two years old into the desert; and was hidden there in a cave. Cedrenus adds, that his mother died after forty days in the same cave, and that an angel undertook the charge of bringing up John. Peter Alexandrinus adds, that Herod commanded his father Zacharias to be killed between the temple and the altar, because he had removed his son out of the way.

The cause, therefore, of the retirement of John into the desert was the fear of Herod; but there were besides other and greater causes both on the part of God and John. The first was that in the desert he might avoid the occasions of sinning which are supplied by associating with men. The second was that he might freely reprehend the vices of the Jews without fear of any one, inasmuch as he knew no one, but like an angel come down from heaven, preached heavenly truths. Theophylact says, “He departed that he might be brought up beyond the reach of the malice of the multitude, and might not be afraid of censuring any one.” The third cause was, that as a future preacher of repentance he might himself first give a pattern of it by living severely in the desert; for austerity of life gives great power to a preacher. The fourth was that by conversing continually with God and the angels, he might lead an angelic life, according to the words, *Behold, I send My angel, and he shall prepare the way before Me*, Mal. iii. 1. For John, living apart from the world in the desert, had time for fasting, prayer, and contemplation; “that,” as Origen says, “he might have leisure for prayer, and might hold converse with the angels, and call upon God, and hear Him answering and saying, ‘Behold, here I am.’” The fifth was that he might be a witness

Moreover, Theophylact says, “All these things were done *œconomically*, that John might be esteemed a witness of Christ worthy of credit;” and Bede, “The future prophet is commanded by previous auspices.”

Symbolically, S. Ambrose says, “Because John was a voice (according to the words, *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness*), therefore at his birth his father, who had been dumb, recovered his voice.”

Ver. 65.—*And fear came on all that dwelt, &c.* That is, a religious fear and reverence towards God Who had done so many wonderful works concerning John both as to his father and mother. For where God displays his power there arises on the part of men towards Him and His majesty a sacred feeling of fear and reverence.

Ver. 66.—*What manner of child shall this be, &c.* God did this in order that by means of these signs He might stir up the minds of all men to the veneration of John as the future forerunner and discloser of Christ, and in order that He might procure authority for him; and that so his testimony concerning Christ might outweigh every objection. Christ revealed to S. Bridget (*Lib. Revel. cap.* 108) that there were three saints who had pleased Him above all others, *viz.*, the Blessed Virgin, Mary Magdalen, and John the Baptist, and that the demons, being struck with terror at his birth, bewailed and lamented when the angels and pious Israelites rejoiced.

And the hand of the Lord was with him. The hand, that is the wonderful power, providence, care, grace, and favour of God (for of all these the hand is the symbol) displayed themselves in this boy, so that it might be seen that he was singularly formed, chosen, and destined for great things. And God showed this—1. by announcing his nativity by an angel to his father Zacharias; 2. by unloosing the tongue and the ears of Zacharias at his birth, so that he might speak the praises of God; 3. by illuminating and impelling him to prophesy concerning the boy; 4. by giving to Elizabeth when old and barren this offspring by a miracle; 5. by giving to the boy a new and unusual name. All which things, being for the most part miracles, portended that John would be a great man and a prophet, and that God would accomplish great things by him; and all who saw or heard these things were filled with great fear, joy, and hope.

S. Ambrose, Origen, and Euthymius add that John himself felt that the hand of God was upon him, since he felt every day that by the operation of God he grew and advanced in the use of reason, in holy inspirations and desires, in the love and worship of Christ, in grace and in merits beyond what was natural to his years.

Ver. 67.—*And his father Zacharias was filled, &c.* Zacharias already had the Holy Spirit, for he was a just man (as we read in verse 6); yet he by the birth of John received so great a fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit, both

sanctifying and rendering him acceptable, and also gratuitously given, *i.e.* of the spirit of prophecy, and he was filled with so great a love for Christ, already incarnate in the womb of the Virgin, that he broke forth into this prophetic song which the Church sings daily in the Divine Office at Lauds.

Ver. 68.—*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.* Zacharias in this song does two things. 1. He praises God for the Messiah incarnate in the Virgin. 2. From verse 76 to the end he praises God by addressing his son John, and celebrates his office as the forerunner of Christ.

The God of Israel. For although He is the God of all men, yet He is especially the God of Israel, *i.e.* of His faithful people, whether they were Jews and Israelites as formerly, or Christians as in these days.

Hath redeemed, &c. God by means of Christ already incarnate had begun the work of the redemption and deliverance of the whole world from the yoke of slavery to the devil, sin, death, and hell, under which it had been held for four thousand years, but especially the redemption of Israel, *i.e.* of the Jewish people, to whom especially the Messiah had been promised. Zacharias by the spirit of prophecy knew of the incarnation of the Messiah in the womb of the Virgin, and therefore that the redemption of the world was already begun, inasmuch as the Redeemer was conceived Who after a few years was about to complete the redemption of the world by His death on the Cross.

And hath raised up an horn of salvation. In Scripture horn signifies strength, power, victory, glory, and consequently a kingdom; for all the glory and strength of horned animals consists in their horns, as S. Chrysostom says. Hence S. Cornelius, pontiff and martyr, is represented in painting with a horn, and received his name from it because with the strength of an horn he resisted the Emperor Decius, and triumphed gloriously over him by martyrdom. See what I have said on Hab. iii. 4, Dan. viii. 4, and Deut. xxxiii. 17.

The meaning, therefore, is that God has again raised up the horn, *i.e.* the excellent power and glory of the kingdom of Israel by Christ the Son of David, which horn had flourished in the times of Joshua, and David, and Solomon, but had now fallen; and this horn was not temporal but spiritual, as I have said on verse 32. There is an allusion to Ezek. xxix. 21, *In that day the horn of the house of Israel shall bud forth.* It is clear, therefore, that the horn of salvation is Jesus Christ Himself the Saviour, and his power, victory, and kingdom; according to that saying of Hannah, 1 Sam. ii. 10, *The Lord shall give strength unto His king and exalt the horn of His anointed.*

Tropologically, Bede says, “The horn stretches beyond the flesh, and so the kingdom of Christ reaches beyond the world and the joys of the flesh; according to which figure David and Solomon were consecrated kings by the horn of oil.” And Origen explains Isa. v. 1, *a vineyard hath been planted in a horn* (Vulgate, *vinea facta est in cornu*), as meaning the Church has been planted in Christ.

world, is also called the Dayspring (*oriens*) because in His day righteousness arose: and He is celebrated in the words of the Psalm, *Truth shall flourish out of the earth*, because being sprung from the womb of a virgin in the consummation of the ages, He said *I am the Truth.*” And again, “He who is crowned with our virtues will arise and will be called the Dayspring; to Whom the Father said, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee;* according to that saying of Isaiah (xi. 1), *Then shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a blossom shall grow up from his root.*”

But other Fathers rightly interpret the word *oriens* as signifying the sun rising from on high, namely heaven, by which they understand Christ Who is the Light of the world, and therefore was born on the earth, that by means of the flesh He might be as it were a transparent sun illuminating every man that comes to Him. So Bede, &c., and S. Gregory (*Lib. 20 in Job, cap. 18*), who says, “Because the light rises from the east, He is rightly called the Dayspring, by the light of Whose righteousness the night of our iniquity is illuminated.”

In both ways, therefore, ought the word *oriens* to be understood here, as alluding both to the springing up of a shoot and to the rising of the sun: for Christ is a heavenly shoot, and He is likewise a sun shooting forth and springing from a Virgin on the earth, as I have already said.

Ver. 79.—*To give light, &c.* Greek *ἐπιφάναι*, or with a different accent *ἐπίφαναι*. If we read *ἐπίφαναι* it will be the imperative mood, so that the meaning will be, *Arise, shine, O my son, like some new sun of the world* (for Zacharias is addressing John), so that through faith in Christ thou mayest illuminate sinners who are sitting in the darkness of errors and sins, and restore them to the light of truth, righteousness, and salvation, and deliver them from the tyranny of the devil.

2. It is better to take *ἐπιφάναι* as an infinitive; so that the meaning will be, *Christ has visited us like a sun from on high to bring the light of true doctrine, grace, righteousness, and joy both to the fathers who were dead, and to sinners who are alive, who both were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.* For literally the fathers were sitting in the dark limbus of Hades, as it were in the shadow of death. And mystically, sinners were sitting in darkness, *i.e.* in dark errors, vices, and sins. S. Chrysostom and others by darkness understand errors, by the shadow of death sins; it is better, though, to take each expression as applying to both; so that darkness means common errors and faults, and the shadow of death serious errors and wickedness.

To guide our feet into the way of Peace. That is, that Christ by the light of His faith and grace may direct us into the way of righteousness; for this is the way of peace; for righteousness is the way and means to attain peace and tranquillity of mind; both peace with God and men in this life, and

shall arise a star out of Jacob and a sceptre (Vulg., virga, a rod) shall spring forth out of Israel, viz. Christ, Who as a star or a sun will illuminate us, and will make us glad with all grace, and as a leader and sun will go before us on the way to heaven. (2.) Zacharias refers to Zech. iii. 8, Behold I will send forth my servant the Branch: Vulg. orientem, Greek ἀνατολήν; and to Zech. vi. 12, Behold the man whose name is the Branch; and to Isaiah iv. 2, It that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious: where the Septuag. translates, In that day God shall shine forth in counsel with glory; and Jerem. xxiii. 5, I will raise unto David a righteous Branch. In Zech. iii. and vi., the Septuag. renders Branch (oriens) by ἀνατολή, and S. Luke has taken the word (which is not found anywhere else) from those passages.

Observe, 3. That in Zech. iii. and iv., for ἀνατολή Hebrew is כִּנְמוֹץ which properly signifies a shoot, as S. Jerome teaches: whence the Sept. elsewhere renders it by βλάστημα; but the word is used to signify many other things by metaphor. This is clear from Ezek. xxix. 21, &c.; and also from the Septuag., which renders the word in Zech. iii. and vi. (as I have said before) by ἀνατολή, which, although it may be used generally of any springing up, even of herbs (according to Suidas), yet is properly used of the rising of the sun, moon, and stars.

I say therefore that Christ is called a Branch, but a Branch from the sun, *i.e.* a heavenly and divine Branch. This is clear (1.) because the word ἀνατολή properly has this meaning. (2.) Because of what follows, the Branch (or Day Spring) *from on high*, *i.e.* from God and heaven: *and shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death*; all which expressions clearly refer, not to the shooting forth of an earthly branch, but of the sun or a star. So Theophilus, Euthymius, &c.

Observe, that Christ is called both, a heavenly and an earthly Branch: for Christ has two generations; a divine, by virtue of which He is the offspring of the Father; and a human, by virtue of which He is the offspring of His mother and of David. Thus He is spoken of by Isaiah, Zechariah, and others as a Branch, (1.) because He will shoot forth as a new Branch from the root of Jesse or David which seemed to have dried up; a Branch I say, at first, shooting forth in heaven, and then transplanted on to the earth. (2.) By the word Branch is signified the littleness and lowliness of Christ at His birth, which afterwards increased to so great a size that the whole world was embraced by its shadow, according to the parable of the grain of mustard seed. (3.) Christ is signified (by the same expression Branch or Dayspring) as a second Melchisedec, *without father* as man; *i.e.* as a shoot springing up from the earth alone, signifying that He was born of a virgin mother: but as God, *without mother*, because he was generated from the Father, like a beam from the sun.

Observe also, that to Christ are rightly attributed three qualities which belong both to the sun, and to a branch, because (1.) He arose in heaven with splendour and glory, and then shooting forth from heaven He sprang up on earth. For Christ is the Tree of Life transplanted to earth from the celestial paradise by the Incarnation, and thence again ascending to heaven and paradise, by the vision and fruition of Himself He bestows upon His Saints an eternity of the highest glory. S. Jerome on Zech. vi. 12, explaining the passage mystically, says, “He who is called Jesus because He saved the

Ver. 70.—*By the mouth of His holy prophets.* All the prophets prophesied of Christ, *e.g.* Isa. xix. 20; Jerem. xxx. 10; Ezek. xiii. 21.

Ver. 71.—*That we should be saved from our enemies.* As God spake by the prophets, and promised salvation, *i.e.* the deliverance and salvation of Israel and the whole world from captivity to the devil, sin, death, and hell, so now hath He accomplished the same, by giving a horn of salvation, *i.e.* a strong Saviour, Jesus Christ. Observe that Zacharias here interprets the ancient prophecies of the kingdom and salvation of Christ, not in a temporal but in a spiritual sense, as is clear from verse 73 and the following.

Ver. 72.—*To perform the mercy.* As God promised Christ to our fathers, so now has He fulfilled His promises, and has shown Christ to their posterity, by Whom He will deliver also the fathers from limbus, and bless them, and bring them into heaven with Himself. Whence Theophylact says, “The grace of Christ reaches even to those who were dead; for through him all will rise again: He also fulfilled the hope of the fathers;” for as Theophylact says again, “When the fathers see their sons enjoying such blessings, they rejoice and are partakers of their joy, in the same way as if the blessings had been bestowed upon themselves.”

His Holy Covenant.—This covenant was made by God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Gen. xii. 3, and xxvi. 4, and xxviii. 14; and it is this, *in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.* Jeremiah explains this blessing, ch. xxxi. 31.

Ver. 73.—*The oath.* This may be referred—1. To the word *remember*. So Euthymius takes it. 2. It may be referred to the word *mercy*. 3. It may, more properly, be referred to the word *covenant*; so that the meaning is, God hath sent Christ, that He might show Himself mindful of the covenant, by which He promised Him to the fathers; which covenant is that great oath which He swore to Abraham.

Or 4, you may refer the word *oath* more plainly and easily to the word *perform* in the preceding verse; so that three reasons may be signified here on account of which God has raised up this horn of salvation— 1. that He might perform His mercy; 2. that He might remember his covenant; 3. that He might fulfil His own oath by which He swore to Abraham that He would multiply his spiritual seed, rather than his seed according to the flesh, as the stars of heaven, and that in his seed He would bless all nations. Gen. xxii. 16, and Heb. vi. 13, 14. The Hebrews often leave words to be understood from those which precede or follow: so here the word *oath* is used for the *performance and fulfillment of the oath*, for these words were spoken by Zacharias when he was exulting, and, as it were, absorbed in joy; so that he has regard to and pours forth not so much words as things; whence in his words he often falls into solecisms and other defects.

Ver. 74.—*That we being delivered, &c.* He explains the oath of God, *i.e.* the blessing which He promised to Abraham, and confirmed with an oath, and shows that it consists in the salvation which Christ brought, that being set free by His grace from our enemies, *viz.*, from sin, the devil, and hell, to which we had been as it were enslaved, we may now serve God in holiness. His service is *latria* which is the worship due to God alone; for in the Greek it is *λατρεύειν*.

Ver. 75.—*In holiness and righteousness.* This is the oath, or blessing of God sworn to Abraham, *viz.* the salvation and grace of Christ and of His Gospel, the excellence and perfection of which He beautifully describes in these words. For the first part of which it consists is liberty, that is deliverance from the slavery of sin and the devil. The second is service, that is the worship of the true and most high God. The third is love, not slavish fear; for the Jews served God through fear of punishment, but Christians serve Him like sons with a free love, Rom. viii. 15. The fourth part is inward and true holiness and righteousness, not outward and placed in washings, sacrifices, and other ceremonies like the righteousness which the Jews had. The fifth part is expressed in the words *before God*, so that we, considering that we are always before the eyes of God, Who beholds the hearts of every one, may strive to show forth before Him a pure and holy heart, and to perform all our works out of such, knowing that God looks into us and beholds the very bottom of our heart, and according to it will judge our works. The sixth part is, that we should perform these things, not on one day, month, or year, but all our days by persevering in them even unto death.

Holiness has respect to God, and consists in the holy worship of God.

Righteousness has respect to our neighbour, and consequently to oneself. Holiness, therefore, gives to God what is His due, Righteousness to men what is their due, so that each should give to each what is owing to him either from justice or charity, and consequently that a man should give to himself temperance, modesty and humility, by which he may conform himself aright to the rule of the law and of virtue, for this is what he ought to render to himself. By holiness and righteousness, therefore, every observance of virtue is signified that is prescribed in the decalogue; for holiness has respect to the precepts of the first table which pertain to God, righteousness to those of the second, which concern our neighbour and our self. These therefore are the duties of the evangelical life to which Christ calls us. This, therefore, is the vocation of the faithful, namely, *that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present life, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*, Tit. ii. 12, 13, so that we should imitate the holiness of God and of Christ, and Christ should seem to live, act, and speak in us; *who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*, Tit. ii. 14, according to that saying of S. Paul, *I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*, Gal. ii. 20. Let each, therefore, contemplate the life and character of Christ, and in them let him behold as in a mirror his own, and he will see whether he is a true Christian or only a false painted one.

Ver. 76.—*And thou, child.* And thou John, though thou art only now eight days old, yet when thou art twenty-nine years old, thou wilt be a Prophet announcing and pointing out the Christ. This is the second part of the song in which Zacharias passes from Christ to his son, and foretells that he will be the Prophet and Forerunner of Christ. S. Ambrose, Origen, Theophylact, and Titus say that the infant, inasmuch as he had been gifted with the use of reason in the womb of his mother, understood these words in which his father addressed him. Ambrose says, “He could hear the voice of his father who before he was born heard the salutation of Mary. He surely knew that there were certain organs of hearing in a prophet, which were unclosed by the Spirit of God, not by the growth of the body.” Bede adds, “Unless perhaps Zacharias is to be supposed to have wished, as soon as he was able to speak, to declare rather for their instruction who were present, the future gifts of his son, which he had learnt long before from the angel.”

For thou shalt go before. As for kings when approaching, the roads are wont to be prepared, levelled and advanced, by removing stones, filth, and other impediments or eyesores, so thou, my son, wilt prepare a way for Christ the King, by removing whatever might be an offence to Him in the minds of the Jews, by exhorting them, by word and example, to repent and to receive Jesus as the true Messiah sent by God, and to believe and obey Him, and so obtain from Him salvation and forgiveness of sins and the grace of God.

Ver. 77.—*To give knowledge of salvation, &c.* That the Jews may know that they ought to hope and seek for salvation from Christ the Saviour *in*, *i.e.* *for*, the remission of sins, so that they may obtain it from Christ through faith in Him and baptism, for in this consists the salvation of Christ; for sins are not remitted except through the salvation and grace of Christ. Whence Bede says, “As if desiring to explain the name of Jesus, he frequently makes mention of salvation, but lest you should think it was a temporal and carnal salvation which was promised, he says, *for the forgiveness of their sins.*”

Ver. 78.—*Through the tender mercy, &c.* Vulg., *Viscera misericordiæ; bowels of mercy*: this expression signifies the most inward and greatest mercy of God.

The Dayspring. Observe—

1. That this Dayspring (Vulg. *oriens*) is in the Greek *ἀνατολή*, *i.e.* *rising*, as of the sun, or *shooting up* as of a branch. The word is used especially of Christ; whence the Chaldean version renders it in Zechariah iii. 8 and vi. 12 by Messiah, *i.e.* Christ.

2. That Zechariah here alludes (1.) to the passage Mal. iv. 2. *To you that fear my name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise (orietur) with healing in His wings*; and to Wisd. v. 6, and to Isaiah lx. 1, and Num. xxiv. 17, *There*