

These notes are provided for personal devotional and study purposes only. They may not be published, distributed, or disseminated to others without the permission of the author.

The Benedictus

Luke 1.57-80

Series: Songs of the Incarnation

December 5, 2021

The Village Church at Shell Point

I. The Music of the Incarnation

- A. The Bassoon has its limitations
 - 1. Now I loved playing the bassoon
 - a. I played it all through junior high school, high school and college
 - b. But it has its limitations
 - 2. It's a concert instrument
 - a. So there are certain things you really can't do with a bassoon
 - b. You can't be in the marching band with a bassoon
 - 3. You also can't play jazz with a bassoon
 - a. At least not very easily
 - b. The bassoon is not a jazz instrument
- B. I tried to play some jazz with my bassoon once
 - 1. When I was in school I liked Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass
 - a. A bunch of high school band members – my brother included – liked the Tijuana Brass
 - b. So they formed a group that got together
 - c. They bought Tijuana Brass arrangements
 - d. And they played Tijuana Brass music
 - 2. And I wanted to play too
 - a. But I had a bassoon
 - b. And there was no bassoon in Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass
 - 3. But our band director suggested that I play the trombone parts
 - a. The bassoon plays in the same clef as the trombone
 - b. And the bassoon is pitched in the same key as the trombone
 - c. So they let me play with the group using the trombone parts
 - 4. But of course, there is no way to make the bassoon sound anything remotely like the trombone
 - a. So that experiment with the jazz bassoon was short lived
- C. But I did over the years learn some things about jazz
 - 1. Even though I never really played jazz music
 - 2. I learned, for instance, that a lot of jazz music is based on improvisation and collaboration
 - 3. The way it often works is that the composer – if there is one – develops a theme for the music – a melodic line
 - a. And that theme, that melodic figure gets the group started

4. But then, one of the performers would take that melodic line, that theme, and improvise on it
 - a. He or she would use their instrument, develop the theme, embellish the theme
 - b. Give the theme their own take on it, their own interpretation
 - c. Infuse their personality into it
 - d. And play for two or three minutes on that theme
 - e. While the rest of the band accompanies and supports the soloist
 5. And then, another musician, on a different instrument, would take over the theme
 - a. And play for another two or three minutes
 - b. And develop the theme with his or her own interpretation and personality and instrument
 6. Occasionally there might be a duet or two
 - a. But the piece would go on for an extended period of time
 - b. With each musician taking a turn
 - c. Developing the theme
 - d. And each performance would be a little different
 - e. As the improvisation and collaboration produces a unique musical experience
 7. But all the while – the theme is never lost
 - a. The theme keeps coming back
 - b. The theme is always reinforced and developed
 8. And a lot of jazz is like that
- D. The Music of the Incarnation as it unfolds in the Gospel of Luke is a lot like that
1. The theme is the coming of the Messiah, the incarnation of the Son of God
 - a. It is introduced quite early in the gospel
 2. But then different voices, different musicians if you will, take over the theme and develop it
 - a. Each one has his or her own unique personality and role to play in the composition
 - b. They each play their part for a while before the theme is passed off to the next voice
 3. It starts with a duet – with an angel of the Lord and a priest picking up the theme
 - a. The priest's name is **Zacharias** and the angel is **Gabriel**
 - b. The angel comes to Zacharias while he is performing his priestly duties
 - c. He tells Zacharias that his wife Elizabeth, who is well up in years, will become pregnant and give birth to a son
 - d. And that the son's name would be John
 - e. Zacharias for his part doesn't believe it; questions the angel
 - f. So the angel consigns Zacharias to silence for the duration of the pregnancy

- g. He is unable to speak; possibly unable even to hear as later in the story others have to communicate with him using signs
- 4. Some people have the misunderstanding about jazz that it really doesn't matter what notes you play; anything goes
 - a. Nothing is further from the truth
 - b. You have to play notes that make sense and develop the theme
 - c. There are wrong notes in jazz
 - d. And Zacharias has played the wrong notes
 - e. So Gabriel tells Zacharias to shut it down; sit out this part of the musical composition
- E. The next voice to pick up the theme is **Mary**
 - 1. Mary is a young teenager; a cousin of Elizabeth
 - 2. Again, another duet ensues – the angel Gabriel and Mary
 - 3. Gabriel tells Mary that even as a virgin she will also be with child
 - a. The Holy Spirit would overshadow her
 - b. And her child would be called the Son of God
 - 4. And Gabriel tells Mary about Elizabeth
 - a. About her pregnancy in her hold age
- F. And then another duet takes place
 - 1. **Mary** travels all the way from Nazareth to Jerusalem to visit her cousin **Elizabeth**
 - a. And they compare notes about their encounter with Gabriel
 - 2. And in fact, the infants in their own wombs pick up the theme as well
 - a. So a veritable orchestra improvises on the theme
 - b. Mary, Elizabeth – and the baby in Elizabeth's womb – participate in ensemble
- G. And then **Mary** takes the theme as a soloist
 - 1. And she sings **The Magnificat**
 - a. Which we explored last week
 - b. A wonderful hymn of praise
 - c. In which she exalts the Lord and rejoices in God her Savior
- H. But then the composition continues to unfold
 - 1. And this time **Zacharias** gets to pick up his instrument and play again
 - a. Remember – he's been sitting out for a time, silent
 - 2. And Zacharias develops the theme
 - a. It's the same theme – the coming of Messiah, the incarnation of the Son of God
 - b. But of course, he has his own development of it; his own take on it
 - c. Infused with his own personality
 - d. Based on his own experience

II. **Dissonant Chords**

- A. Sometimes in jazz there are dissonant chords
 - 1. One of the things that makes jazz jazz
 - a. Jazz has developed out of human experience

- b. A lot of jazz out of African-American human experience
 - c. And human experience is often messy
 - d. Life is messy in a broken world like ours
 - 2. So in compositions like that we often find dissonant music working its way through until there is a musical resolution
 - a. And that's kind of what happens here in Zacharias' song
- B. **Luke 1:57–58** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.
 - 2. 58 Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.
 - a. No dissonance there
- C. **Luke 1:59** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.
 - a. “They” – who’s “they?”
 - b. They are the extended family and friends
 - c. They seem to have taken over the celebration; they’ve decided what the baby’s name would be
 - d. And when family’s get involved in stuff like this, there is often dissonance in the music of life
- D. **Luke 1:60–61** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 60 But his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.”
 - 2. 61 And they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.”
 - a. There’s the dissonance
 - b. Dear Elizabeth tries to set the record straight
 - c. But she gets push back from friends and family
 - d. They don’t approve of the name Elizabeth has selected
- E. **Luke 1:62–63** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.
 - 2. 63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.” And they were all astonished.
 - a. And now they were silent – the friends and family
- F. **Luke 1:64** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 64 And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.
 - a. So now comes the resolution of the dissonant chords
 - b. Zacharias enters the composition, picks up the theme
 - c. And his praise of God changes the mood, the atmosphere of the composition
 - d. And advances the theme
- G. **Luke 1:65–66** (NASB95) —

1. 65 Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.
 2. 66 All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.
 - a. Turns out that this musical composition will be one remembered throughout the lives of that little community
 - b. Indeed – remembered by all those touched by the incarnation
 - c. For we all know about it
- H. So Zacharias picks up the melody, embellishes the theme
1. And puts his own personality into it
 2. Offers his own praise of the God who is orchestrating this divine composition
 3. We call it **The Benedictus**
 - a. Because the first word in Zacharias musical expression is **“Blessed”**
 - b. Gk – eulogetos – a “good word” literally
 - c. And the Latin translation of eulogetos is “benedictus”
 - d. Bene = good
 - e. Dictus = speech, word, diction
 - f. Benediction, benedictus
 4. A good word for God
 - a. Who has composed such a miraculous work
- I. There are two parts to Zacharias’ song
1. The first is a melody about the Redeemer
 - a. That is followed by a melody about Zacharias’ son John, the prophet
 2. There is **The Redeemer’s Melody**
 - a. And there is **The Prophet’s melody**
 3. There is a primary theme in the music of the incarnation
 - a. That is the coming of Messiah, the incarnation of the Son of God in the flesh
 - b. And then there is a secondary theme
 - c. The prophet’s voice who will prepare the way for the coming of Messiah
 4. The order is significant and important
 - a. And Zacharias has it right
 - b. In spite of his fatherly pride in the role of his own son John, Zacharias knows that John is not what this musical composition is primarily about
 - c. That John is a secondary actor, a supporting actor, in this drama
 5. And so Zacharias begins his part, his song, praising God for the Redeemer, the Messiah

III. **The Redeemer’s Melody**

A. **The Horn of Salvation**

1. **Luke 1:67–70** (NASB95) —

- a. 67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:
- b. 68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,
- c. 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant—
- d. 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—
- 2. The “horn of salvation” amplifies a common OT figure of speech
 - a. “Horn” – symbol of an animal’s power and strength
 - b. The part of the anatomy by which certain animals intimidate lesser rivals
 - c. The part that causes those animals to have their way and accomplish their purposes
- 3. The coming of Christ, the Redeemer, is an exhibition of the power of God at work
 - a. And anyone standing in the way of Messiah ought to be shaking in their boots

B. **The Deliverance from our Enemies**

- 1. And speaking of anyone standing in the way...
- 2. **Luke 1:70–71** (NASB95) —
 - a. 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—
 - b. 71 Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;
- 3. The music of the incarnation continues to develop its theme
 - a. And one after another reveals a new dimension of its melodic line
 - b. The strength and power of God is one; deliverance from our enemies is another
- 4. Sometimes the audience has a hard time understanding what the performers are driving at in the performances
 - a. And this is one where I’m not even sure Zacharias understood the full implications of what, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God intends to convey
- 5. For Zacharias and the Jews their enemies were understood as being the Romans
 - a. The occupying power, who kept the Jewish people under their oppressive thumb
- 6. But as the gospel composition – in Luke and in the whole of the NT – continues to unfold we learn something else entirely
- 7. Our enemies are not so much the Romans, but the forces of evil which afflict the entirety of our world
- 8. World
 - a. The anti-God system in which human agency and institutions conspire together to try and establish order and well-being without God

- b. An enterprise that eventually produces the opposite – only chaos and destruction
 - 9. Flesh
 - a. The sinful nature of humanity – residing in each one of us
 - b. Functions to generate selfish desires and actions
 - c. Which, again, end up in self-destructive patterns of behavior and conduct
 - 10. Devil
 - a. The superintendent of the evil spiritual realm which loves to use the world and the flesh to discourage and destroy, if he could, the people of God
 - b. Our contest is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places
 - 11. But the coming of Messiah, the incarnation of the Son of God, is a melody that dispels our true enemies
 - a. In which the glories of the music of the incarnation dispel the darkness of our world
- C. **Covenant Mercy**
 - 1. Luke 1:72–73 (NASB95) —
 - a. 72 To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant,
 - b. 73 The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
 - 2. The music of the incarnation, while new, has continuity with the promises of God to Abraham
 - a. And beautiful melody of His covenant mercy toward the objects of God's love – the people who belong to Him by faith
 - b. The true children of Abraham
- D. **Holy Service**
 - 1. **Luke 1:74–75** (NASB95) —
 - a. 74 To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,
 - b. 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.
 - 2. The music of the incarnation expands beyond the original players
 - a. We too pick up the theme, play the Redeemer's melody
 - b. By serving Him in love – without fear
 - c. And by doing so in holiness and righteousness
 - 3. That is our part in the composition
 - a. Our piece in the music of the incarnation
 - 4. In addition, of course, to the sacrifices of praise we render to our glorious Composer
- E. And then Zacharias shifts to blessing God for the special role his son John will play in the music of the incarnation
 - 1. A secondary theme – subservient to the Redeemer's Melody
 - a. But an important one nonetheless

IV. The Prophet's Melody

A. The Preparation of His Ways

1. Luke 1:76 (NASB95) —
 - a. 76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;
2. Preparation is always important to the conduct of a musical composition – no matter the style
 - a. Even in jazz, there is much preparation
3. And John will come preparing the way for the Messiah
 - a. He will herald His coming
 - b. He will capture the attention of the people of God whose repentance will set the stage for Messiah's fruitfulness
 - c. His life of devotion will model how we all, in reverence and holiness, prepare ourselves for our personal encounters with Christ

B. The Knowledge of Salvation

1. Luke 1:77 (NASB95) —
 - a. 77 To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,
2. The Prophet's Melody will provide a prelude – a musical introduction – to the grand theme of the incarnation
 - a. Salvation in no one other than in Jesus Christ
 - b. Whose life, death, and resurrection will provide the foundation of the forgiveness of our sins
 - c. So the Prophet's Melody intertwines with the Redeemer's life and work, with the grand melody of redemption

C. The Darkness Dispelled

1. Luke 1:78–79 (NASB95) —
 - a. 78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,
 - b. 79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”
2. What glorious resolution to the dissonant realities of our dark world!
 - a. What wonderful postlude to this composition
3. To see how John's message is like the sunrise after a long, dark night
 - a. And how the Redeemer's Melody shines in our dark world
 - b. Dispelling the wickedness, evil, destruction, and chaos of a world system bent on selfish ambition
 - c. Shining in the deepest recesses of our own hearts, revealing our own darkness
4. Again – the Prophet's Melody intertwines with the Redeemer's Melody
 - a. Creating a beautiful duet, a rich harmony, a delightful counterpoint
5. Creating a composition which displays the power and glory of the incarnation

- a. Where God with us, Emmanuel, fills our hearts with such love and adoration that we, along with Mary and Zacharias
- b. Cannot help but sing the glories of the incarnation