

Big idea: The overarching idea is fulfilment, and the obedience that this engenders, but it is packaged in the ideas of wonder, awe and praise.

FCF:

Application:

1. Wonder, praise, awe...

I was chatting to a friend from Wee Waa the other day, in the Woolies' carpark. She had come to Narrabri for dinner and a drive by of all the Christmas lights.

I love – our family loves – the drive by of Christmas lights. Some of the light arrangements are simply astounding. Some are beautiful, almost whimsical. Some just overwhelm the senses, with an assault on every sensory nerve in your eyes! Others are humourous. And all of them show a level of dedication and effort and care. As you drive around, you can hear the gasps, the yells, the exclamations, and you can see the fingers point and the heads swivel, and you can enjoy the wonder and praise, even awe, at what is being seen.

It got me thinking about the whole gamut of Christmas emotions. Christmas, in all the seasons and holidays, seems to have developed a stranglehold on the emotions of wonder and praise and awe. The wonder does not stop at the Christmas lights – it is there in the eyes as they behold the Christmas tree and all the gifts layered underneath. The awe is connected not just to gifts,

but also to food and family and the celebration. And the praise is often abounding.

Now, I know that these are all ideals, even stylized with the backdrop of Hollywood and muzak, but they are there – this wonder, awe and praise. But, if you pause and consider them – and the objects that stimulate them – these emotions at Christmas have pretty shallow roots. The Christmas lights are packed up each year and a blown bulb can wreck the whole thing. The presents – well, at least one of them is broken by the end of the day, and the wrapping can sometimes look better than the contents. And the food? Well, it gets eaten, cleaned up and leftovers is what it becomes!

At such a time, is there a source of wonder, awe and praise that is a little longer-lasting, perhaps even a little more significant?

PRAY...

2. The scene has been set...

Like any good author, Luke has set the scene.

We know his purpose – he wants to reassure Theophilus, a Roman public-servant, that what he has been taught, and trusted, about Jesus is certain and true.

We know his method – he has investigated, from the first, everything about the life, times and purpose of Jesus. He has taken this investigation and turned into a writing that is in 'orderly sequence'.

We know his backdrop, the bigger context for what he is doing – it is about ‘fulfilment’. He views the events and claims of the life of Jesus through the lens of the promises of God – the promise of God to roll back sin and bring blessing, through Abraham’s family. And the promise of God to have this world restored under the kingship of his Son, from the family line of a man called David.

The scene has been set. Two births have been announced – one boy is to prepare the way for the other boy. One boy will be a prophet from a family of priests, and the second will be a king from the family of kings, David’s family. Both announcements were surprising and unexpected. Both announcements were by the hand of and initiative of God. Both announcements were fulfilments. Both announcements were greeted with some level of skepticism.

Zechariah, the recipient of the first announcement, was struck dumb by God in judgement for his doubt. He was a godly man, but he needed to learn obedience. Mary was given a statement of fact, and a statement of truth, in response to her queries.

Mary investigated – and was astounded at the fact and affected by the truth – ‘Nothing will be impossible with God’. And she broke into song.

We left Mary as she left Elizabeth at the eve of the birth of this baby that Zechariah wondered about...

3. ‘Now the time had come’ (vs.57-58)

Look at verses 57-58... READ

Luke's focus on fulfilment stands out as he simply relays the birth of Zechariah and Elizabeth's boy. Besides the matter-of-fact statement of the birth, the language is language of fulfilment – it will be repeated in Luke 2:6. The description of the neighbours' response is likewise language of fulfilment – listen again to what Gabriel had clearly said to Zechariah, those nine months earlier...

READ 1:13-14...

On a purely superficial level, nothing should surprise us about this birth. It has happened just as God said it would, even down to the reaction of the neighbours!

On a more considered level, it should start to stir in us emotions of awe and wonder and praise. These things have happened exactly as God said they would. These things have happened – impossible! These things have happened, and the overwhelming response is that of joy and wonder and praise! Just listen to the neighbours...

4. 'HIS NAME IS JOHN' (vs.59-66)

And wonders don't cease there – **look at verses 59-60... READ.**

The righteousness of Zechariah and Elizabeth is emphasised with the statement about their observation of God's law.

The naming is a simple matter, until Elizabeth throws a spanner in the works with her statement. There should be no surprise here – after all, Elizabeth and Zechariah would have 'discussed' this

matter. The emphasis on fulfilment has been raised again – remember Luke 1:14?

There are witnesses to this moment. These witnesses – ‘they’ – are gathered to name this boy. They are so shocked by Elizabeth’s statement that they turn to Zechariah – **look at verses 62-64... READ.**

This layers another level of fulfilment onto what is happening. Zechariah’s dumb mouth is opened after he writes clearly that ‘HIS NAME IS JOHN’. Just as Gabriel had said – remember 1:20? This man was to be judged because he did not believe what God had stated so clearly. As he writes the name of his son, his lips are loosened, as God had stated.

But there is even more going on here. Did you pick up the change in tense between Elizabeth and Zechariah, as they stated the name of their son? Elizabeth is future, whilst Zechariah is present. I suspect that we are meant to notice that Zechariah has grown in obedience as he has contemplated the consistency of God in doing as he stated. In this, fulfilment is met with obedience that comes out of trust (REPEAT).

Zechariah is not reacting just with raw emotion to God fulfilling his promises – and did you notice that Zechariah is a fulfilment-act within the wider fulfilment-act? Zechariah is driven from the fulfilment to obedience – he can now understand the work of God as he should, and respond as he should.

And this is all encapsulated in wonder, praise and awe – even fear – **look at verses 63-66... READ.**

This is better than Christmas lights and Christmas tucker and even Christmas presents. This is God doing exactly as he said, in real time and space, with real people, and there is the real baby!

Before we unpack further the response of Zechariah, the question asked by the witnesses – and Theophilus could go and talk with them, 'cause Luke did! – is worth pondering: 'God's hand is here – what is happening? What will this child do and become?'

It is a question we always ask about children – they always fill us with wonder and awe and praise – here is another full human being!. But the emphasis is not so much on what the boy will become, but on what God will do with him. After all, this birth only happened because of the hand of God. This man could only speak because of the hand of God. The name was chosen by the hand of God – what does this mean for the boy?

For Theophilus, this emphasis on God acting, and the fulfilment that this has produced – and all witnessed, and all the emotions that have gone with it – for Theophilus, here is certainty: 'Just go and see the eyewitnesses'.

The same is the case for us. There is certainty here, as we watch this fulfilment unfold, as we see the change in Zechariah, as we contemplate the overwhelming emotions of praise and wonder and awe. In know that we removed from this action, but I suspect that the praise and wonder and awe are relevant and appropriate,

even for us. We have just see how these events have unfolded, exactly as God stated!

5. 'Praise the Lord'... (vs.67-79)

Zechariah's song of prophecy – and it is – just look at verse 67 – is in the context not just of his reaction what has happened. It is also an answer to the question of 'What will happen to this boy – what will he become?'

Zechariah states three truths...

(i) God has come (vs.68)

Look at verse 68... READ.

Zechariah praises God because this fulfilment is about the coming of God. There is nothing more, and nothing less, going on here than the visitation of God to this broken world. And the purpose of this visitation is to provide 'redemption' – to set people free.

The fulfilment theme here is not just within the timeframe of Zechariah's life, and the last nine months – what has happened to him is a statement that God is doing, on a grand all-of-the-world and all-of-history scale, exactly as he promised – and we will come to that in a moment.

The amazing thing here is not that an elderly godly couple have had their prayers answered. The amazing thing here is that the birth of John is stating very clearly, 'God is here'.

(ii) God has done exactly as he promised (vs.69-75)

The big picture of this occasion is that God is doing exactly as he promised to do – **look at verses 69-75.... READ.**

The theme of fulfilment is not just seen in what has happened to Zechariah and Elizabeth – it is seen in their fulfilment being part of God's greater fulfilment: that God would save his people (REPEAT).

This was promised to David – remember that God promised to bring a king from David's family who would rule the world rightly.

This was promised to Abraham – remember that God promised to roll back sin, and bring his approval, through Abraham's family.

This promise of God has its endpoint not in his people feeling good, nor in his people being rewarded, not even in them having life that works out as they hope for. This promise of God has its endpoint in humans being everything that God created them to be – did you see that there in **verses 74-75? READ**

Put even more simply, it seems that Zechariah is stating that God doing as he says, as he promised – fulfilment – leads not just to praise and wonder and awe – it leads to God's people being everything God created them to be: his representatives, to display him as he should be known.

(iii) God has dealt with sin (vs.76-79)

At the heart of that is John preparing people for God's coming; moreover, as John does this, his focus is the same as God's

focus: humans need to have their sins dealt with – did you see that there in **verse 77?**

At the heart of humanity's inability to serve God as they should, at the heart of humanity's inability to take God at his word, is sin: the attitude and action that says, 'I am God and God is not'. At the heart of that being dealt with so humans can be what they were created to be is forgiveness – and only God can do that – deal with human sin by forgiving human sin.

In fact, this was at the heart of God's promise to Abraham. And this was at the heart of God's promise to David – God dwelling with his mob. And so, John will get people ready for God coming to deal with the thing that has separated humans and God, broken this world: sin.

You can almost see Luke joining the dots for Theophilus... if God fulfilled what he promised to Zechariah and Elizabeth, and if they responded with praise and wonder and awe, and this led to obedience, then imagine the enormity of God going further, and fulfilling what he promised to Mary – and that is enormous! Moreover, the fulfilment in John will lead to the preparation of the fulfilment in Jesus. And that won't just be messages and proclamations, but the dealing with the very thing that has damaged all humans and all of this world: sin!

6. Wonder, praise, awe... and obedience!

Wonder, praise and awe – Christmas has a bit of a monopoly on those emotions. Christmas lights, Christmas presents, Christmas

food – is there anything a little more substantial than these as drivers for those emotions?

Let me tell you there is – and it lies in God doing exactly as he promised, in the certainty of fulfilment.

As Theophilus looks at the fulfilment for Zechariah and Elizabeth of John's birth, and the change this brings in Zechariah as he learns to obey, then Theophilus is confronted with the even bigger goodness of John as the preparer: he is getting people ready for the big one, when God himself will come to roll back sin, bring his approval and rule the world rightly. And this leads not just to wonder, praise and awe, but obedience, as God's people are saved to be what they should be: his image-bearers in the world.

There is wonder here at the light of God's promise dawning on the world, and the prospect of the blackness of our brokenness being dealt with. There is praise here for the gift of God's son, as our saving king, and our sins being forgiven. There is awe here that God does exactly as he says – and there is nothing more certain. And, finally, there is the statement of obedience that we see in Zechariah, as he stops doubting the truth of God's promise and starts obeying it!

We are doing as Theophilus – and we are confronted by all the same things. Can I encourage you to think on this at Christmas? Can I encourage you to think of how you can share a source of wonder, praise and awe much deeper than lights and food and wrapped presents? Can I plead with you to encourage each other – as families, as spouses, as parents – to do the same? And, can

Place: NAC
Date: 17/12/2020
Passage: Luke 1:57-80

I plead with you to ponder, as Zechariah must have, the right response to such amazing certainty and fulfilment?