

BIBLE BACKGROUND  
Luke 1:76-79

Verses 76-79

**But you child, are called to be a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to make his way ready, to give to his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, through the heartfelt mercy of our God. With these things, the high rising sun will visit us to shine on those in darkness and those lying in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet in the way of peace.**

Zechariah prophesies about his son that he has a wonderful destiny because the Lord has set him apart to be his most favoured **prophet**. It is he who will be the forerunner of the Messiah, called here, **the Lord**. **He will go before him**, literally before his face, to prepare and make **ready the people** of Judea and Galilee.

This preparation is through a revelation, a revelation of **knowledge** that makes plain to them how they can be **saved**, that is, only through **forgiveness**. Forgiveness presupposes repentance, because the people will have to acknowledge their misery and sins. God forgives, not because he has to, but because of his **heartfelt** σπλάγχνα **mercy**, a feeling deep inside his body, from his innards. The Lord carries out an audit, like the ATO, sifting through every thought, word and deed, and catching us in our faithlessness, hardness of heart, selfishness, back-biting, theft and many other great wrongs proceeding from a life lived in opposition to him.

John proclaimed forgiveness but forgiveness is a passing over of sin, produced by compassion and mercy, but sin is left untouched, its harm and its guilt left without a remedy. Therefore the next verse is crucial, for the Lord comes after John, and **following these things**, he is like **the high rising sun**. Unlike an object of space, such as the sun, Christ actually **visits to shine** through his ministry on those in darkness. What is the nature of this shining? Luke will recount all the light coming from him, but principally grace for those estranged from God, free acceptance and entry into fellowship with him, for his kingdom would be amongst them. And being so close, his saving loving would actually deal with **the darkness** within, the human nature that is always seeking itself above everything else. Thus Christ would take human sin, unhappiness and all the misery we inflict on ourselves and other, even our own death, **the shadow of death we all live under**, and through sacrificing his life, make atonement for the past.

Only then, with Christ within, cleansing us in a real way, declaring us free of sin and guilt, can we know what peace is, peace with God and with others.