

Ghost"—filled with his influences, and also with a spirit of fervent and devout thanksgiving. May not the question of verse forty-three contain an acknowledgment of Elizabeth's conscious inferiority to Mary (as the mother of our Lord,) similar to that afterwards made by John to Christ? and may it not also imply Elizabeth's recognition of the truth of the Incarnation? "Blessed is she that believed"—the first beatitude of the New Testament, and, in a certain sense, the root of all the rest. Elizabeth, while extolling the blessedness of Mary, was undoubtedly reflecting with compassion on the condition of Zacharias, whose unbelief had been reproved with loss of speech, while the believing Mary was entering her house with joyful salutation. Though not indispensably necessary to Mary, yet the words of assurance that the things promised should be all fulfilled, must have been most gladly welcomed, and must have proved a confirmation of her faith.

Vv. 46-56.—Mary's beautiful hymn pours forth from her believing heart in reply to Elizabeth's psalm-like salutation. The song is clearly no carefully prepared hymn for the occasion, but bursts forth spontaneously as the unpremeditated outpouring of deep emotion—the outburst of a joyful faith. She owns Christ as her *Lord* and *Saviour*, she is his *handmaiden*, and owns her "low estate" as such, thereby, beforehand, as it were, disclaiming that worship which Roman Catholics blasphemously give her.—With her whole heart and with all her powers she exalts and glorifies her Lord—"My soul doth magnifying the Lord." In reading her hymn we are frequently reminded of the songs of Hannah and David, of Miriam and Deborah, manifesting that she was well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures. She celebrates the grace of God in verse forty-eight. The covenant-promise, "In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed," made originally to Abraham, is now applied particularly to herself. All nations would be blessed in her as the immediate progenitor of the Messiah. In vv. 49-54, God's omnipotence, his holiness, his mercy, his love, his justice and his faithfulness, are all celebrated. God is the "mighty"—the Almighty One, and "shows strength with his arm." He is the Holy One, and "Holy is his name." He is the Merciful One, for "His tender mercies are over all His works." He is the Loving One, and "His love is from everlasting." He is the Just One, the "just God and yet the justice of the ungodly." He is the Faithful One, his faithfulness is everlasting, from generation to generation,—a covenant-keeping, a covenant-remembering, a covenant-fulfilling God.

LESSONS.

1. The contrast between the introduction

of the Old and New Testament covenants. The old introduced with circumstances of fear and terror,—the new, at its very first appearance, is greeted with songs of praise and joy.

2. That the songs of Elizabeth and Mary are full of the persuasion that "the Messiah is to be the head of the prophetic brotherhood, the source of temporal as well as spiritual prosperity to Israel, the highest blessing to the world, the highest gift of grace, the supreme manifestation of the glory of God.

3. That all who are the true subjects of divine grace in the heart, will manifest it in the life, and will be always ready to recognize and acknowledge the sovereign, the distinguishing, the electing love of God, in the matter of their own personal salvation.

THIRD SABBATH.

SUBJECT: *Birth of John the Baptist.*—Luke i. 57-80.

Mary remained with Elizabeth three months, but left probably before the birth of John and returned to Nazareth, from which she had speedily to retrace his steps to Bethlehem.

Vv. 57, 58.—The divine promise to Zacharias is fulfilled. John is born. Elizabeth's friends rejoice with her over the "great mercy" of God upon her. We should be ready always to rejoice sincerely when our friends are favoured of God.

V. 59.—Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with his people. See Gen. xvii. 10-14, and Lev. xii. 3. The child was to be circumcised on the eighth day. It was a sign and token of spiritual grace, like baptism, and no good Jew neglected the duty of thus devoting his child to God. It was not essential to salvation any more than is baptism. "They came"—any Israelite could perform the ceremony.—"After the name of his father"—this was not the custom among the Jews, but in this case it was to be done because Zacharias would have no other son to bear his name.

Vv. 60-64.—He was called the divinely appointed name, John, "Jehovah's gift." (Join the last clause of ver. 63 to ver. 64. The cause of their wonder was that Zacharias's mouth was opened.) The first use to which he put it was to praise God.

Vv. 65, 66.—God's hand was manifest in all the circumstances, hence this "fear" and anxious curiosity. John was born probably at or near Hebron.

V. 67.—The prophecy of Zacharias was uttered on the very day of circumcision. He spoke of events shortly to happen.

V. 68.—*Visited and redeemed*—God had resolved to do so, and the prophet realizes by faith the unseen and future, as if it were present. This refers to the coming of Christ—his birth, which was to take place in less