

“Zacharias’ Advent Song of Praise”

(Luke 1:67-79 – Midweek Advent 2 – December 11, 2024)

Luke 1:67-79 – ⁶⁷Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: ⁶⁸“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, ⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, ⁷⁰as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, ⁷¹that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, ⁷²to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, ⁷³the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. ⁷⁶And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, ⁷⁸through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Dear Redeemed in Jesus Christ:

Many of us have looked with wonder at a newborn child. A baby is a wonder of God’s creation – so delicate, so loved, so much life ahead in which many great things may happen. The birth of the baby who would grow up to be John the Baptist was also filled with wonder, but for more than just the normal reasons. Great things indeed were happening with his arrival.

Nine months before the time of our text, John’s birth had been announced in an amazing way. Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth had always been unable to have children. Now they were elderly, and it seemed impossible they would ever have a child. But God had His plans.

Zacharias was a priest in Israel. When his time came to fulfill priestly duties, he was in the temple burning incense. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared saying: “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.... He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” This was no ordinary birth announcement! An amazed Zacharias questioned the angel’s words: “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.” The angel

answered: *“I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time”* (Luke 1:13-20).

As God promised, Zacharias and Elizabeth conceived. Nine months later, their baby was born. As we come to our text, it is eight days after his birth, when he was to be circumcised and given a name. Zacharias was still mute and could not speak. But as soon as he wrote on a tablet, *“‘His name is John.’ ... Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God”* (Luke 1:63-64).

Now, we might expect a proud father to have much to say about his newborn son. But Zacharias was not speaking on his own. It says: *“Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied”* (vs. 67). As we will see, his words are about more than just the birth of his son John. They are really all about the Savior, Jesus. In view of His coming with salvation, let us join **“Zacharias’ Advent Song of Praise.”**

The first thing we can join Zacharias in blessing God for is that the words of the prophets are now fulfilled. Zacharias exclaims: *“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham”* (vs. 68-73).

Long before, God had told Abraham: *“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”* (Genesis 22:18). This Seed of Abraham is Christ the Savior, through whom all nations are blessed (Galatians 3:16). Later, God promised David: *“I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body... I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. I will be His Father, and He shall be My son”* (2 Samuel 7:11-14). This Seed is Christ – David’s Son according to the flesh, and God’s only-begotten Son from eternity. His Kingdom is established forever.

Now, in view of the fulfillment of God’s promises, Zacharias rejoices that God *“has raised up a horn of salvation.”* A horn is an instrument of strength in animals. Here, it is used as a symbol of strength in God’s salvation. Zacharias says the Lord *“has raised up”* this horn of salvation. For already, the Savior was in the world. Jesus had been conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. That is why earlier, when Mary visited Elizabeth and Zacharias, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

and exclaimed: *“Why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy”* (Luke 1:43-44). In her womb, Mary was carrying the Lord Jesus, the Son of Abraham and David. Even then, the unborn baby John in Elizabeth’s womb had leaped for joy in the presence of God’s horn of salvation!

We can join Zacharias’ song of praise, because the words of the prophets are fulfilled in the coming of our Savior. But we need to understand rightly the kind of salvation He has brought. Zacharias says the Savior had come *“that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us”* (vs. 71).

Many Jews did not rightly understand this salvation. They wanted a Messiah who would bring political salvation and deliver them from worldly enemies who hated and oppressed them – like the Romans who now occupied Israel. Today too, many people do not rightly understand God’s salvation. They dream only of making the world a better place. They want Jesus to be a kind of messiah to help save people from social, economic, political, or moral wrongs. But they do not feel the need for the true salvation He brings from our worst enemies – sin, Satan, and eternal death.

That is why God sent John ahead of Jesus, to prepare people’s hearts to receive Him rightly as the Savior He truly is. Zacharias speaks of John’s purpose this way: *“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God”* (vs. 76-78).

Zacharias’ son would grow up to fulfill God’s call, preparing people’s hearts to receive Jesus by *“preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”* (Luke 3:3). John the Baptist called people to repent of sinful attitudes and ways of life that would keep them from welcoming the Messiah. At the same time, he pointed to Jesus as the Savior who had come to take away their sin. As they confessed their sins, John administered baptism for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name.

Are there any sinful attitudes or ways of life that could keep us from rightly welcoming the Savior who was born for us? In this season of giving, do we focus too much on the gifts we give and receive, to really embrace the greatest Gift God has given, to look with wonder on the Baby Jesus, born as our Savior? In this season of joy, do we get swept up in the short-lived joys of commercialism and greed, seeking happiness in the toys and trinkets of this world; so that we miss out on the true and lasting joy of eternal life Jesus came to win for us? In this season of peace, do we hold unforgiving attitudes that would prevent us from welcoming in our hearts

Him who was born as the Prince of Peace, to win our forgiveness?

Here we come to understand what Zacharias meant as he spoke of “*the tender mercy of our God*” in bringing us His gift forgiveness and salvation in Jesus. After all, it was not when we were deserving or thankful. When we were still walking apart from God in our sinful ways, in mercy He sent His Son to be born as our Savior. God so loved us that He sent His eternal, only-begotten Son, into our flesh to pay for our sins on the cross. In Jesus, God forgives all our sinful attitudes and behaviors.

Now, in His Baptism for the remission of sins, God has cleansed us of all sin by the precious blood of His Son. In this washing of regeneration, He has poured out His Holy Spirit on us, working repentance and faith in our hearts to receive Jesus.

So by His most generous Gift, God has shone the light of His tender mercy on us in Jesus. As Zacharias says: “*the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*” (vs. 78-79). Through faith in Jesus, we have been brought out of the darkness of sin and enmity with God, out of the shadow of spiritual and eternal death. Jesus has come to us like the rising sun, with the dawn of redeeming grace. He has saved us from our enemies of sin, death, and Satan. He has given us forgiveness, peace with God, and eternal life as God’s children.

Since God has fulfilled His promises in the birth of our Savior, we can rejoice with Zacharias: “*that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life*” (vs. 74-75). We can serve God without fear as we live in Jesus’ forgiveness, clothed in His holiness. Even when we go through hard times, or the future seems uncertain, we can live confidently. For our loving Savior is working all things for our good. We need not fear earthly enemies, those people or things that may threaten us. For Jesus, who gave His life for our eternal life, is watching over our life today.

This is why, as Zacharias served as a priest in Israel, he could pray and praise God confidently at His altar; and He could go out and share the Good News of God’s salvation in Christ with the people. Now through faith in Jesus, God has made us His royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). We can draw near to His altar confidently, lifting our prayers before Him as incense; and we can join Zacharias’ Advent song of praise, as we proclaim the Good News of Jesus, the Savior who has come for all people.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.