

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
Advent 1, December 2, 2007

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Hymns: 62 (63:5) 512, 73:1-4, 73:5

Lessons: Genesis 12:1-8; Ephesians 5:8-14; Luke 19:29-40

Text: Luke 1:67-79 (NKJV)

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ our Lord,

The first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel presents what may be called a paradoxical situation, something that is seemingly contradictory. It has to do with Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. It seems so contradictory to hear of Zacharias doubting the angel's message regarding the coming birth of his son, John, and then in the words of our text to hear Zacharias speak so confidently and joyfully of the salvation in Christ and the work of his son, John, as the Forerunner of the Christ.

There is a reason for this. When the angel, Gabriel, told Zacharias that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son in her old age, Zacharias was filled with doubts. There was a lack of faith in his heart. He relied too much on his own human understanding, instead of simply accepting the message from God. Because he doubted, God made it impossible for John to speak until the promised son was born. Zacharias had many months to think about the angel's message. Then, after his son was born, on the day he was circumcised, the Lord restored to Zacharias the ability to speak. Now the words rushed from his lips, showing strong faith in all that the Lord had promised. The Holy Spirit filled his heart to speak joyfully and confidently of the promised salvation and the part his son, John, would have in proclaiming this salvation.

We now want to meditate on the joyous words that Zacharias spoke. They are words that should fill our hearts with joy in this Advent Season as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' first coming into the world. We call the words Zacharias spoke,

ZACHARIAS' JOYFUL ADVENT HYMN

- 1. Praising the Lord for His tender mercy;**
- 2. Prophesying of his son, John, the Forerunner of the Christ.**

Zacharias' joyful Advent hymn begins with the word "blessed". In the Latin language it is known as the "BENEDICTUS of Zacharias." He said, "*Blessed is the Lord God of Israel.*" To bless the Lord means to praise Him. The reason for his praise is given in our text: "*He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David.*" God visited His people in this sense that He showed His tender mercy to them and redeemed them from their sins.

This is the reason for Zacharias' joyful Advent hymn. To redeem means to buy back. God's people were bought back from the hand of Satan. This redemption was necessary because Satan deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and all of Adam's descendants became sinful. Paul writes, "*just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*" Romans 5:12. Man lost the image of God with which he had been endowed at the time of creation and was now sinful. Without redemption from sin, everyone would have been doomed to eternal death in hell.

God determined that the time for redeeming His people had come. Paul writes, "*when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons,*" Galatians 4:4-5. The time had come for God's

Son, Jesus Christ, to be born as a true man, to suffer and to die and to shed His precious blood as the ransom price for man's redemption. Man was now to be bought back from Satan, sin, and eternal death in hell, by Jesus' work of redemption.

Though the redemption spoken of in our text by Zacharias was first promised to God's chosen people of Israel, the blessings spoken of were won for all people. This is also why the words of our text are most appropriate for us to hear in this Advent Season. The promise of salvation is referred to several times in his hymn of praise. He speaks of ***"The oath which He swore to our Father Abraham."*** God under oath made a promise to Abraham, ***"in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,"*** Genesis 12:3. From Abraham's descendants would come the Savior of all people. This promise was repeated to Abraham's son, Isaac, and to Isaac's son, Jacob. Later on it was repeated again and again by the prophets God sent. So Zacharias praised God saying, He ***"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."*** For years and years God's people had waited for the promised salvation. The long-promised Messiah was now to come. Zacharias could speak of this because our text says that he ***"was filled with the Holy Spirit."***

Zacharias could also speak specifically of what that promised Messiah would accomplish. He says that God ***"has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David."*** The word ***"horn"*** in the Hebrew means power and strength. Jesus would show His power and strength as the spiritual King of the Jews. He would establish His kingdom on earth, but it would not be like kingdoms of this world. It would be a spiritual kingdom of grace bringing salvation to sinners. This promised Savior, our text says, would according to His human nature be a descendant of King David. Jeremiah the prophet prophesied, ***"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, 'that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,'"*** Jeremiah 23:5-6.

What this powerful King would do for His people, our text says, ***"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."*** Jesus came to save His people, not from enemies such as the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Romans, but from their spiritual enemies, from Satan and his followers, the unbelievers. The result of this deliverance would be ***"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."*** Jesus came to cleanse sinners from their sins so that they might serve Him in His kingdom in righteousness and holiness. Thus we as believers in Christ our Savior are able to serve the Lord according to His holy commandments by our God-pleasing works which are fruits of our faith in Jesus.

All this Zacharias spoke in his joyful hymn of praise as though it were already an accomplished fact, even though Jesus was not born until six months after he spoke. But the Lord Jesus had already been conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. This was a guarantee of the completed salvation Jesus would accomplish.

Now we hear Zacharias **prophesying of his son, John, the Forerunner of the Christ.**

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"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." Zacharias prophesied that when his infant son grew up, he would be a very special prophet of God. Both Isaiah and Malachi in the Old Testament foretold of John the Baptist. Isaiah spoke of his preaching, ***"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God,"*** Isaiah 40:3. Through Malachi God said, ***"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me,"*** Malachi 3:1. As the Forerunner of the Christ, John appeared in the

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wilderness of Judea to preach to the people that their Messiah had come. Six months after John began his preaching, Jesus began His public ministry. John's work was to prepare the hearts of the people to receive their Savior. Our text speaks of it in these words, ***"To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which 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."*** John the Baptist was a stern preacher of repentance. He preached the law to the Jewish people because of their self-righteousness and false piety. The proud Jewish religious leaders rejected this preaching for the most part and never accepted their Savior. Herod, the king of the Jews, rejected the preaching of John and was angry with him because John had told him that it was wrong for him to take his brother's wife, Herodias. So John suffered persecution by being put into prison by the king. We like to remember John the Baptist as the one who pointed out Jesus to his followers and said, ***"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"*** John 1:29.

John's most important work as the Forerunner was to tell the people of their salvation. Our text says, ***"To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins."*** He preached of forgiveness of sins ***"through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us."*** God has been merciful to sinners. In His tender mercy He sent His own Son into this world in the flesh to suffer and die as the sinners' Divine Substitute. He took their sins upon Himself and made full atonement for them by His suffering and death. This tender visitation is also referred to as the ***"Dayspring from on high."*** God in his tender mercy looked down upon His people sitting in the darkness of sin on this earth. He beheld them sitting in the shadow of death, threatened by eternal death because of their sins. God therefore sent His own Son to take away their sins and the threat of death in hell. Sinners are unable to find the way to salvation by their own efforts because they are in spiritual darkness. To them the Lord has given spiritual enlightenment through the Gospel that they might be guided in the way of peace. Through Jesus Christ sinners have been reconciled to God. Paul says, ***"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them,"*** Second Corinthians 5:19 NIV. Peace has been made between man and God. The great Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, established that peace by His work of reconciliation. Now believers can joyfully say with Paul, ***"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"*** Romans 5:1. This is the peace on earth that we sing about at Christmas time: ***"Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"*** Hymn 94:1.

You see, then, why we call Zacharias' words in our text "A JOYFUL ADVENT HYMN". What Zacharias prophesied by the Holy Spirit, has all been fulfilled in Christ. What John the Baptist long ago proclaimed in Judea has also been proclaimed to us through the preaching of the Gospel. Through the tender mercies of our God we have perfect salvation in Christ Jesus. Let us, then, begin this new Advent Season with this hymn of joy:

***"Lift up your heads, you mighty gates!
Behold, the King of Glory waits;
The King of kings is drawing near,
The Savior of the world is here.
Life and salvation He does bring,
Wherefore rejoice and gladly sing:
We praise Thee, Father, now,
Creator, wise art Thou!"*** Amen.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 73:1)