

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday In Advent, December 22, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 55, 238:1, 74, 512:1-4, 512:5-6.

Lessons: Malachi 3:1-4, Revelation 1:4-8, Matthew 11:25-30.

Sermon Text: Luke 1:67-79.

Sermon by Pastor M.H. Eibs

Fellow-redeemed in Christ:

Every year before Christmas we speak about the coming of Christ in the Advent season, for the word “advent” means to come. Every year in the Advent season we repeat an ancient message that is always new and refreshing, for it speaks of salvation for sinners. Every year in the Advent season we sing songs of salvation in Christ Jesus, for he came to save us from our sins. A look at some of our Advent hymns shows the emphasis on words like “gladness,” “rejoicing,” “hosanna, praise and glory.” There is good reason for such words, for the hymn-writer says:

“Jesus comes to hearts rejoicing, Bringing news of sins forgiv’n;

Jesus comes in sounds of gladness, Leading souls redeemed to heav’n.” (The Lutheran Hymnal, 56)

This morning, as we hear our text, we hear:

ZECHARIAH’S SONG OF PRAISE TO THE LORD - AN ADVENT CLASSIC.

- 1. Praising God for fulfilling his promise of redemption in Christ; and,**
- 2. Foretelling of the work of John the Baptist in giving the people knowledge of salvation in Christ.**

This morning we’re going to hear a preacher. We refer not to the one in the pulpit, but to the ancient priest Zechariah, for our text says: *“His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.”* The occasion for Zechariah’s prophesying or preaching was the circumcision of his son John. This preaching followed a period of months of a God-imposed silence. Zechariah had not been able to speak because of his unbelief when the angel Gabriel had announced to him that his old and barren wife Elizabeth would have a child. Now, after the Lord gave him months of thinking about what the angel had said, and after having meditated on the promises of the coming salvation in the Messiah, Zechariah by the power of the Holy Spirit was truly ready to break forth with a mighty song of praise.

In the first part of that song of praise, Zechariah praised God for fulfilling his promise of redemption in Christ. These are his words, as inspired by the Holy Spirit: *“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.”* His people were the ancient people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But they for the most part rejected their promised Messiah in unbelief and refused the salvation he came to bring. Therefore, they are no longer his people. The true Israel today is the spiritual Israel, the believers in Christ, all who have the faith of Abraham. We praise God today because he graciously came to his people and sent his Son to redeem all sinful mankind. He sent Jesus to pay the ransom price for our redemption. That ransom price was the holy, precious blood of his Son and his innocent suffering and death on the cross. Paul writes: *“There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.”* I Tim. 2:5-6.

In his song of praise Zechariah also says: *“He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago).”* The prophets in the Old Testament Scriptures speak of the promised Christ as the Son of David. Jeremiah, for example, said: *“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, ... This is the name by which he will be*

called: "The Lord Our Righteousness." Jer. 23:5.6 The genealogies of Jesus our Lord in Matthew and Luke show Jesus, the virgin's Son, to be the descendant of King David. God's Son became a true man also as a descendant of David.

The promised Savior is spoken of figuratively as *"a horn of salvation."* The word "horn" in the Hebrew means "power, defiance, rule, whereon one may rely." (P. E. Kretzmann) The psalmist David says of the Lord: *"He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."* Ps. 18:2 God promised this *"Horn of salvation"* through the prophets of ancient times, even from the beginning of the world. God promised salvation in the virgin's Son already to Adam and Eve as Moses the prophet recorded in Genesis 3:15. God promised salvation from ancient times through many prophets. We think of the beautiful words of the prophet Isaiah in foretelling of the sinner's Substitute in Isaiah 53: *"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities."* v. 5

SALVATION is the theme of Zechariah's song of praise. *"Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us... to rescue us from the hand of our enemies."* These enemies were not political foes or enemies of their land whom they fought in wars. These are spiritual enemies. Zechariah praised the Lord for delivering his people from sin, the power of Satan, and eternal death. The salvation of our souls is what we also praise God for in this Advent season. We rejoice, because as Paul writes: *"the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."* Tit. 2:11 This salvation is only in Christ, as Peter told the Jews: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* Acts 4:12 Salvation is our urgent message, just as Paul told the Corinthians in his day: *"I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."* 2 Cor. 6:2 To put off hearing the Gospel is a foolish delay that can result in eternal damnation!

Zechariah also speaks of God's purpose in sending the promised Savior: *"to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham."* The Lord is praised for his mercy in remembering the covenant he made, swearing to Abraham that he would have a son in his old age, that he would be the father of many nations, that the land of Canaan would be his inheritance, and that in Jesus his descendant all nations upon earth would be blessed. God told Abraham: *"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you, and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."* Gen. 17:7 Then the Lord instituted circumcision as a *"sign of the covenant"* v. 11, for all males in Israel when they were 8 days old.

God's purpose in sending the promised salvation in Christ, Zechariah said in his song of praise, was also this: *"to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."* Believers in Christ are enabled to serve the Lord in their lives as they strive by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel to do what pleases the Lord. This believers can do without fear. Luther writes: "For a Christian is sure and certain that his sins are forgiven, though he still feels them; he is also sure that death cannot harm him, the devil cannot vanquish him, the world cannot prevail against him." (Luther, 11, 2286)

After praising the Lord, Zechariah turned to his 8-day old son, John, and foretold of his work in giving the people the knowledge of salvation in Christ.

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"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him." Zechariah's son, John the Baptist, born to him and his wife as a miraculous gift in their old age, was to become the Forerunner of the Messiah. He was born 6 months before Jesus and served as the one who would go before the Lord to prepare the hearts of people to receive their promised Messiah. Later on Jesus told the people: *"This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'"* Matt. 11:10

Note again that Zechariah speaks of SALVATION when he speaks of the work of his son John being the Forerunner of Christ. John's ministry would be to *"give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins."* Thus, when we read of John the Baptist's preaching in the Bible, we hear about sins, forgiveness, repentance. *"He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance"*

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for the forgiveness of sins.” Luke 3:3 John’s message consisted of a preaching of both Law and Gospel. He had to preach the stern message of the Law, especially to the self-righteous Pharisees who didn’t think they needed any baptism for forgiveness. All people need to hear the Law, Paul writes, *‘so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law, rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.’* Rom. 2:19-20 Ever and again we need to be made conscious of our sins, our transgressions of God’s holy commandments and the fact that we truly deserve his anger and punishment, even eternal damnation in hell.

But the Gospel message must ever receive the main emphasis in our preaching, even as Zechariah spoke of John’s work *“to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.”* What a precious message that is, to hear that we who deserve no less than eternal damnation, have forgiveness in Christ our Savior. Remember the ransom price Jesus paid for our redemption! He shed his blood; he innocently suffered and died in our place. The Gospel declares the good news to us, as Micah in the Old Testament proclaimed in these words: *“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but you delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”* Mic. 7:18-19

As Micah spoke of God delighting to show mercy, so Zechariah spoke of forgiveness of sins *“because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”* The coming of the salvation in Christ when Jesus came to this earth, was like the dawning of the sun bringing light in darkness. The people of this earth sat in the darkness of sin, and Jesus came to bring light to the nations with his saving work. Thus Isaiah foretold: *“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.”* Is. 60:1.2

This ancient message is still the needful message for all those in the world today who sit in the darkness of sin and in the shadow of death. This is why we, by God’s grace, continue to preach the Gospel of Christ as our only message to dying men.

May we in this new church year look forward eagerly to hearing this preaching, and may the Holy Spirit work in our hearts an ever-new appreciation for the message of salvation in Christ, and help us to bring it to others. Amen.

(Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for November 27, 1988)