

Advent Sermon Series: Songs for the Savior - Zechariah's Song

Luke 1:67-79. ⁶⁷ His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ⁶⁸ Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited us and prepared redemption for his people. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ just as he said long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets. ⁷¹ He raised up salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, ⁷² in order to show mercy to our fathers by remembering his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath which he swore to Abraham our father, ⁷⁴ to grant deliverance to us from the hand of our enemies, so that we are able to serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, because you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of God's tender mercies, by which the Rising Sun from on high will visit us, ⁷⁹ to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The Rising Sun will visit us.

- 1. To give hope and joy to those who sit in darkness**
- 2. To guide our feet into the way of peace**

It sure is dark outside for a long time, these days. In fact, I looked it up last night and while December 21 is technically the shortest day of the year, today, is one of the days when the sun goes down at its earliest time all year. It's dark for a long while and that can take its toll on us, physically, mentally, emotionally. The darkness can make us anxious, tired, a bit down, and even afraid. But while the short days and the prolonged darkness can wear on us we know this won't last forever. We know the sun will come up again as the earth keeps spinning around the sun. We know that eventually the days will get longer again. And so each night, no matter how many minutes and hours of darkness there is, we fully expect that the sun will rise. In time, the darkness will be chased away, and we will go about our day in the light of a new day. We can lie down and get up in peace because we know that the light is coming.

The darkness referenced here in Zechariah's Song, and the darkness that we are to be most concerned about, is not so much a physical darkness, but it is a type of spiritual darkness. In those days there was a spiritual darkness that affected

many in the land. In Zechariah's time many were struggling with this long night of watching and waiting. God had brought them back to the promised land, but that was so many years ago, and still they were waiting. This nation of people was once and proud and mighty nation, but the house of David had been humbled. A house of kings, was a mere shadow of itself. In this humble state they waited. And so there was this darkness in the land of those who were waiting and uncertain, who doubted the promises of God. Some had given up hope altogether, some had forgotten completely or had never known that a promised Savior was coming. Some must have thought that God had forgotten about them.

But because of the tender mercy of God the Rising Sun would come and shine from on high. The long-awaited Messiah would come and bring hope and peace and joy to those sitting in darkness. John, the forerunner had been born, and the greater servant would come as promised. The voice silenced because he did not believe the angel's proclamation that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a child, now bursts forth with praise and adoration, joy and gospel proclamation. And notice how Zechariah speaks of the grace of God. Eight days after the birth of his son, as he confirms the boy's name as John, Zechariah, not only speaks for the first time in months, but he is filled with the Holy Spirit and he prophesies. Through the power of prophecy, through the power of the Holy Spirit, this man who had doubted God's miraculous plan of sending him a son in his old age, spoke with absolute confidence in God's plan of salvation and victory through the coming Messiah. He speaks as if all this had already happened. ***68 Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited us and prepared redemption for his people. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 just as he said long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets.***

Now there would certainly be much pride and joy in Zechariah's voice as he spoke about his newborn son. Zechariah is now a proud father even in his old age, and on top of that, his son would play a significant role in preparing the way for the promised Messiah. As a father I know that I get rather excited to talk about how my kids did this or that. Zechariah's son, John, would be called a prophet of the Most High, in a time when there were no longer any prophets. He would prepare the way for the Savior. John would give people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. Who could blame Zechariah if he boasted in who his son would be? However, Zechariah's message, and John's mission would both focus on the redemption and forgiveness that comes through the coming Christ. John would call out to a spiritually blind people to repent, and he would give the people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of sins. But he was certainly not the source, he would serve by pointing others to Jesus, the Lamb of God who truly takes away the sin of the world. Yes, John's mission and hope point to the rising sun, Jesus

the Light of the world, who would come to visit his people. A light shining in the darkness, such welcome and wonderful news.

That is still very much the case today. Jesus comes to visit a world that is very much smothered in darkness. We live in dark times. There is a lot of evil, a lot of bad things, in this world. And it weighs on us. We have our own struggles as we very much live in the heavy shadow of sin and death. Sin effects our lives in so many ways. We make our own bad choices. We have this sinful habits that we can't kick. We have health problems. We have to deal with financial troubles. We struggle with guilt over sins committed and regret for things left undone. Family members and friends groan under the weight of sin and we suffer with them. Death comes and leaves us hurting as we mourn over friends and loved ones. This all accumulates. The grey and gloomy clouds of life gather, the dark shadows of death hover over us, the darkness of this world of sin reaches for us, it surrounds us. We are tempted to despair. Our enemy the devil wants us to give up hope. The world scoffs at our faith and tells us there is no hope. But the darkness will not overcome us. Our enemies will not overpower us. For the Rising Sun comes to visit us.

The good news of Jesus gives us hope; his gospel restores our hope. In the darkness of this world the light and joy of Jesus is relentless. He comes to visit us. He comes and like a warm and colorful sunrise, his mercies are new every morning. The Rising Sun brings light and hope and joy to our lives. For Jesus comes as that promised Messiah. It is through him that our sins forgiven. He sends messengers of his grace to give us the knowledge of salvation. The child born of Zechariah points us to the child born of Mary. Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. Jesus came to defeat sin and death and hell for us. This was the plan of redemption that God had prepared for his people. This was the plan of salvation that Jesus would fulfill just as promise. And just as he promised He will come again and bring us to the eternal light of heaven, where there is no darkness at all. That is the promise, the joy, of which Zechariah proclaims in his song, that we sing today. This is the light that gives hope and joy in the darkness of this world.

Last week we took a look at Mary's song and we heard how she receive the news of the angel with this fresh faith and confidence. This young girl heard this impossible news and she believed and she praised her Lord. There is, of course, a contrast here in the story of Zechariah. This older priest, heard the Word of God's messenger and he doubted. A man who should have known better, doubted. Maybe it was the cynicism that comes with age. Maybe he just couldn't get over the overwhelming evidence that this kind of thing just doesn't happen. And so he hesitated, he doubted, and that prevented him from serving the LORD in faith.

As we prepare for Christmas, as we watch the children prepare for their Christmas services and sing their songs and say their lines there is also an encouragement to a daily return to that kind of childlike faith that trusts and

believes in the promises of God. Because God's Word says so they believe. God has made these promises. He has given us messengers to teach us, to give us the knowledge of salvation. Oh to have the faith of a child.

As we get older, life might get more complicated, there may be more challenges, and enemies that threaten our faith. And so even though we should know better, even though we have heard these promises and know them by heart, we doubt. We are dragged down into despair by the darkness that surrounds us. We know that Jesus has won the victory, that he is our risen and living Lord, who rules over all things, but still we look around and the darkness and we wonder, we doubt. We know that he has defeated death, but when more of our friends and neighbors and family members die, fear grabs at us.

Because of his tender mercies, the LORD comes, not only with the light and hope and joy of salvation as we await our final redemption, but he gives us peace that sets us free to live for our God and serve him each new day. ***Because of God's tender mercies, by which the Rising Sun from on high will visit us, ⁷⁹ to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.***

God in his grace comes to us through his word and he tells us in countless different ways all those things we already know, but are blessed to hear again. Your sins are forgiven in Christ. The Savior has come. Jesus defeated sin with a perfect life, died and rose again in your place. And now even death itself, that thing that casts this dark shadow on our lives, that threatens to fill us with fear and dread, even this, even death itself, has been defeated in Christ. Just as the prophets had foretold; our Savior became one of us. The long-awaited Messiah came and won for us salvation and victory over all our enemies of darkness. Just as promised he has come. And so now God's people both young and old can live in the brightness of his light. ***the Rising Sun from on high will visit us, ⁷⁹ to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*** We have hope and joy in Jesus. He is the Rising Sun who comes to visit and help us. He comes to shatter our darkness, to cheer us with his warmth and love. In him our many sins are forgiven our doubts are chased away and by his grace we have been set free to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness and in peace, all our days. Amen.