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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 30, 2014
1st Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 61:1-3; Revelation 1:4-8
Hymns: 55; 66; 704; 399:3,4 (Liturgy-248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 1:68-79

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,
69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,
70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,
71 That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,
72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:
74 To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our
life.
76 “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,
77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people
By the remission of their sins,
78 Through the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;
79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of
death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, The Judge of all, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Zacharias' Faith.

The speaker of the words of our text was a priest named Zacharias. He was John the Baptist's father. Unfortunately for Zacharias he, along with the Apostle Thomas, is better known for his doubt than he is for his faith. The Scriptures record how Zacharias doubted the angel's announcement that he and Elizabeth would have a child in their old age. It was simply too hard to believe. It went against human reason and experience. And yet it was true, and as the sign of the angel made Zacharias mute for several months, it also opened his heart to believe even greater truths than these.

The event leading to Zacharias' prophecy was the circumcision and naming of his son. While many friends and relatives surrounding him were insisting on a name that would have appealed to Zacharias' ego as well as long established tradition, Zacharias was firm, firm in obedient faith, in naming the child John. Yes, this event is a great testimony to Zacharias' faith, a faith which was made even clearer in the inspired words of prophecy which he spoke as his first words in many months. Zacharias did not want people marveling at his faith, but rather that they should comprehend the wonder and glory of what was taking place right then in their lifetimes!

THEME: God has Visited and Redeemed His People.

This is the message about advent, an advent sermon meditation that would lead us today, 2000 years after Zacharias spoke these words to marvel at a truth which God fulfilled --

I. Just as God Promised.

God had declared from the very beginning of the world, right after the fall into sin, that a Savior would be born into the world. He declared it through His prophets, Moses in the Pentateuch and

David in the Psalms, as well as the other prophets in their books, each receiving God's message of salvation in greater and clearer detail. This Savior who was to come into the world was to be Immanuel, God with us. All was fulfilled as God had promised, and not in just a figurative manner that God would visit His people with His blessing, but quite literally. He **“raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David.”** The Son of David came into the world to redeem us from sin and death. He was mighty to save. He did what we could not do because we were already corrupted by sin. We have no power to deliver ourselves from the enemy, that old evil foe. God visited His people in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate and eternal Son of God. He came down to earth to be our brother, to free us from our enemy.

At the time that Zacharias spoke these words Jesus was not yet born, but he had already had his first encounter with the Lord. Mary was a cousin to his wife Elizabeth and after the angel Gabriel had told Mary of how the Savior was to be born Mary shared this good news with her cousin. Mary went to be with Elizabeth, and John had leaped in his mother's womb as Mary entered their home. Elizabeth was inspired by the Holy Spirit to recognize and declare Mary to be the mother of her Lord! Zacharias believed the gospel that was being fulfilled right there before them, in their lives. The Lord visited Zacharias' heart and blessed him with faith.

May the Spirit so bless us with faith that we may recognize that this visitation of the Lord to His people on earth was also a blessing of salvation for us. The Lord has visited and redeemed His people so--

II. That We Might Serve Him.

God had remembered **“His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to our father Abraham”** that in Abraham and in his Seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. That Seed was Jesus, and the time had come for Him to be born into the world so that we might be blessed. The blessing of which Zacharias prophesied was

Luke 1:74-75 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

As long as we were captives of the devil, and slaves of sin we could not serve the Lord. Indeed, in our sinful state we were in great fear of the Lord because of His holiness. No one can stand before the Lord in their sinful state and live. What a transformation comes to us because the Lord has visited His people. Now we hear **“Fear not!”** We need not fear because we have been delivered from the hand of our enemies. The devil has no power over us. We have been redeemed, our debt of sin has been paid. Now we are free to serve the Lord without fear.

Think of the difference that Jesus brought into our relationship with God. In spite of the fact that at our best we still fall daily into sin, as regenerate children of God we do not tremble with fear and great dread at what shall befall us because of our transgressions. We come before God confessing our sins and pleading the merits of Jesus and we are assured that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son has cleansed us from every sin. God calls us to serve Him in all that we do. And He is gracious to receive our service as an acceptable thank-offering for the salvation that He has brought into our lives.

For this to take place, that we serve the Lord without fear, we needed to know the truth of the gospel, and we had to be called to repentance and faith. The message of God’s visitation needed to be proclaimed for all the world. So Zacharias prophesied how his son John would go before the Lord and how—

III. His Herald Announces the Lord’s Visitation.

Luke 1:76-79 “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, 77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

John would be on the scene a mere three months or so before Jesus would begin His own public ministry, but the power of the message which John proclaimed was from God. It was the power of the gospel. Yes, John pointed out people's sin and hypocrisy. John made it clear that a change was necessary in people's hearts and in their lives. He called for people to repent. When we think of that word "**repentance**" for our own lives the first thing that comes to mind is sorrow and contrition over the sin in our lives. That is the first change in thinking about sin that is necessary for us to be saved. One cannot continue to embrace one's sin, and cherish it, and revel in sin, and celebrate one's sin, and find salvation. A person with such an attitude concerning his sin sees no need for a salvation. When the curse of sin is made clear, that it brings only shame, and death, and hell, one must be shaken! When the true nature of one's sin is seen, and how vile we have been made by sin's presence in our lives so that we ourselves are disgusted by the filth of our own sin, then we are on the right track in changing one's thinking about sin. That may be where John began, to bring people to see their problem with sin, but that is not where John stopped.

John was sent "**To give knowledge of salvation to God's people By the remission of their sins.**" He came proclaiming a baptism for the washing away of sin. John declared that God was visiting His people so that He could remove their sins and make those sins disappear forever.

If you think cancer going into remission is a wonderful thing for which one ought to rejoice, multiply that wonder and that joy in finding that one's sin is in remission! And that is exactly the joy that the Lord has brought to earth, has brought to you and me, not because we deserved a break, but purely because of the mercies of our God! In His mercy the Lord had compassion on us in our fallen state and He "**has visited and redeemed His people!**"

"**The Dayspring from on high has visited us,**" to shed on us the light of salvation. He drives the darkness away. He enlightens our souls so that the bright beams of salvation shine upon our hearts and we know God as our Father. We are blessed to comprehend within us the grace and peace of God. In His merciful goodness He has given us peace that starts right now during this earthly life and

finds its fullest culmination in the everlasting life that we possess with Him in heavenly joy.

These words of our text are really glorious. These are words that passed over the lips of a man named Zacharias, a man who had been mute for better than nine months. The words that first crossed his lips were not self-serving in any way. The words that crossed his lips after long months of silence were words of faith, words glorifying his God and Savior, and words which testified boldly so that all those gathered around him might hear of the wonders which God has done in fulfilling His promises of salvation and bringing to us the light of salvation.

How blessed we are to know and believe in our hearts that **“God has visited and redeemed His people.”**

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.