

Fourth Sunday in Advent
 Dec. 22, 2013
 Luke 1:67-80

In Christ Jesus, whom we BEHOLD as the Baby in the cradle as well as the God/Man Savior upon the cross, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We asked last week, “what would you do if you had not been able to speak for 3/4 of a year and suddenly were given back that ability?” Well Zacharias used his voice to praise the Lord. His first words were **HIS NAME IS JOHN!** in loving obedience to the angel’s command to name his son John. But then Zacharias broke forth into a marvelous song of praise similar to the one Mary proclaimed when she was with Elizabeth. As Zacharias held his son John in his arms, he held the beginning of God’s fulfillment, the forerunner of the Messiah and he was moved by the Holy Spirit to prophesy and praise God. He began to praise the God who is not merely remembered for His deeds of the past but who is one who is constantly present.

Let us rise and read together the first portion of this morning’s sermon: verses 67-73

The past, of course, is important. Zacharias refers to the “**HOUSE OF HIS SERVANT DAVID**” recalling all of God’s mighty acts of deliverance and His many saving promises declared a thousand years back. Remember David and Goliath and all of his victories in battle.

But we can go further back than that. We can go back to the time of Moses standing on the shores of the Red Sea, with nowhere to turn. The enemy Egyptian army was to the west, mountains to the north, desert to the south and the impassable Red Sea to their east. Yet the LORD God showed His saving power when He visited and redeemed His people and split the Red Sea and they walked across on dry ground.

Or we can go back a little further still: to Egypt and hear the cries of the Israelites in their slavery as they are being cruelly mistreated, their baby boys being slaughtered. Again we see the LORD God visiting and redeeming His people by raising up for them the prophet Moses who together with Aaron confronted the powerful Pharaoh and demanded **LET MY PEOPLE GO!** Through the 10 plagues the LORD brought about their freedom from slavery.

These mighty acts and promises of God made several thousands of years ago are not just interesting stories, but they have real meaning for us in the present and for our future. As in the case of Israel at the time of Moses, as in the case of David, the Lord raised up a **horn of salvation**, literally this reads, **a cornucopia of deliverance**. Most of us know what a cornucopia is. A horn of plenty, an overflowing supply of blessings. We usually see a cornucopia, or pictures of one around Thanksgiving time. That’s the picture Zacharias is drawing for us.

HERE HE COMES! BEHOLD!

**I: BEHOLD OUR GOD IS CONSTANTLY PRESENT,
 COMING TO VISIT AND REDEEM HIS PEOPLE.**

Moses told his people and these words still apply today: **DO NOT BE AFRAID, STAND FIRM AND YOU WILL SEE THE SALVATION (DELIVERANCE) THE LORD WILL BRING YOU TODAY...THE LORD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU; YOU NEED ONLY TO BE STILL.** The Psalmist declares: **BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD; I WILL BE EXALTED AMONG THE NATIONS. THE LORD ALMIGHTY IS WITH US, THE GOD OF JACOB IS OUR FORTRESS.**

As Zacharias held in his arms this child of promise, he was assured of the fact that the Lord God keeps all of His promises. The fulfillment of what the angel had said to him, that even in their old age, he and Elizabeth would have a son who would be the forerunner of the Messiah, was but one proof that all of God’s promises will surely come to pass. For God has spoken and when God speaks, His Word is as good as done. Yet God has done more than just speak. Zacharias says, **(HE HAS) PERFORMED THE MERCY PROMISED TO OUR FATHERS, (HE HAS) REMEMBERED HIS HOLY COVENANT, THE OATH WHICH HE SWORE TO OUR FATHER ABRAHAM.** The terms pile up in one great and blessed assurance. The Lord has promised us, the Lord has covenanted with us, the Lord has sworn an oath with us that we will be saved. May we hold

our tongues, be still, sit quietly even in troubling times and simply **BEHOLD, SEE, LOOK UPON OUR GOD IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST, COMING TO VISIT AND REDEEM US FROM ALL OF OUR ENEMIES; FROM SIN, DEATH, SATAN AND HELL.**

With repentant hearts, let us look to our constantly present Savior seeking His forgiveness. Let us rise and join in the confession of our sins found on page 5.

Let us read together verses 74-75

HERE HE COMES! BEHOLD!

II: BEHOLD, WHAT WE ARE SAVED FROM AND WHAT WE ARE SAVED FOR.

There are so many contradictory messages at this holiday time. The world tells us that the message of Christmas is world peace; showing love by giving and sharing; getting back to family customs and togetherness; feasting and helping the poor. But the angel who spoke to Joseph and the shepherds didn't say anything like that. The angel declared that the message of Christmas is this: **UNTO YOU IS BORN A SAVIOR, CHRIST, THE LORD,...FOR HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS.**

Zacharias had the Christmas message straight in his mind and heart. He was led to behold, to see what he was saved from and what he was saved for. Zacharias proclaimed: **TO GRANT US THAT WE, BEING DELIVERED FROM THE HAND OF OUR ENEMIES...**

When you hear the word enemies, whom do you think of? Perhaps we should say what do you think of? According to the Bible our enemies are not primarily people, powers or nations, but things like temptations, Satan and his evil spirits, our own sinful flesh and heart. These are the kinds of enemies that destroy mankind spiritually, that lead us away from the presence of the Lord. Jesus came in the manger to redeem us from just such soul-destroying enemies as these by His perfect life and atoning death upon the cross as our substitute.

Without this knowledge of who our enemies are, and what Christ has come into the world to do, we cannot properly prepare for or celebrate Christmas. The Christmas message would then be an empty message that would last only as long as the season itself. And for many that is it. Christmas and its effects last two days. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, or perhaps a week for those who get the whole week off.

But we know that we have been freed from our enemies and as Zacharias says, we have been redeemed for a very important purpose: that we **MIGHT SERVE HIM WITHOUT FEAR, IN HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE HIM ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIFE.** Righteousness and holiness, of course, are the very gifts our Savior Himself bestows upon us by virtue of His perfect life, death and resurrection.

These gifts are ours through faith in Him. And then with faith in Him we are to put these blessings into action in our lives. We will then want to give and share this Good News with others, we will tell others of the peace of God that fills our hearts, we will want to live in daily obedience to God's commandments, we will be moved to live for Jesus who lived and died for us. And the wonderful thing about this is, we will be able to do this by the power of the Spirit living in us, without fear, without being afraid of being condemned or forsaken by God.

The Apostle John writes, **THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE; BUT PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR... WE LOVE HIM FOR HE FIRST LOVED US.** Christ's perfect love for us has redeemed us, bought us back from the fear of death, damnation and Judgment; from the fear of tomorrow or whatever problems we will have to face in the future. This Baby of Bethlehem is also the Lord of lords and King of kings who lives and rules to all eternity. Living in Him means we never have to worry or fear for our future, for our future is secure in Him. He indeed deserves our praise and service for in Him we never need to be afraid.

Let us rise and join in boldly confessing our faith in our Triune God in the words of the Apostle's Creed. Hymn 93

Let us rise and read together verses 76-80

HERE HE COMES! BEHOLD!
III: BEHOLD, WE HAVE NOT YET SEEN THE END OF THE MERCY
GOD HAS FOR US.

Zacharias spoke in the past tense when he said: **GOD HAS VISITED AND REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE;** for he saw in his son John, the beginning of the fulfillment of God's sure promises. But **BEHOLD,** we have seen nothing yet. **WE HAVE NOT YET SEEN THE END OF ALL THE MERCY GOD HAS PREPARED FOR US.**

John's calling was to go out before the Lord Jesus and prepare the hearts of the people for His coming. He was the last in a long line of witnesses and prophets who declared the coming of the Messiah. But that long line of witnesses has continued, now with the message of **LOOK WHAT I HAVE SEEN! BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD!**

In the midst of all of the noise and clamor of this season we need to make our voices heard, loud and clear: **CHRIST HAS COME! HE HAS REDEEMED YOU AND ME AND ALL PEOPLE. HE HAS FULFILLED ALL THE PROMISES OF THE PAST. HE HAS VISITED HIS PEOPLE IN THE FORM OF A HUMAN BEING, THE GOD/MAN SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.**

But there is even more to declare. This message is not just for Zacharias' time, not just for our time, but for eternity; for this same Jesus will come again and on that great day we will see Him. We will **BEHOLD** the final result of all of God's mercy upon us--the ushering into eternal bliss.

Christmas is just the beginning! The Good News of Good Friday and the cross (Jesus' crucifixion), the Good News of Easter and the Empty Tomb (Jesus' resurrection) is yet to be proclaimed this coming new year and the final act of our redemption, our resurrection to everlasting life is yet to come.

May we put Christmas in its proper perspective. Not as a one time celebration, or as the greatest, most exciting holiday of the year, so that once its over, it is done with till next year; but may we look upon it and celebrate it as the beginning of many, many blessings.

The Father gives His Son and there is so much more yet to come. May this Christmas message shine into our hearts so that we too like John the Baptist, will grow strong in the Spirit, living in this wilderness as we await the appearing of our Lord and Savior and the conclusion of the final act of our salvation.
Amen.