

Luke 1:68-75
Second Sunday after Christmas
January 3, 2010

Luke 1:68-75 (New International Version)

⁶⁸"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. ⁶⁹He has raised up a horn^[a] of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— ⁷²to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

A difference in the way males and females are wired is in talking. In general a woman has more words to say in a day than a man. If a husband has used most of his words at work, it can present challenges for communication among the couple at home.

Whether you are a person of many words or few, being unable to speak would be difficult. If you had been unable to talk for nine months and suddenly received the ability to do so, what would your first words be? That was the experience of Zechariah. Do you recall what happened to him? He was serving as a priest in the Temple at Jerusalem when an angel revealed that he and Elizabeth would become the parents of John the Baptist, the one to prepare the way for the Savior. When he responded with words of disbelief, he was struck dumb. The pregnancy occurred even though the couple was now elderly and had been unable to produce children. John was born as the angel had promised. It was the day of his circumcision and naming, which occurred on the eighth day of life for baby boys in Israel. The neighbors and relatives thought the little tyke should be Zechariah Junior. When they couldn't persuade Elizabeth, they came to Zechariah. He answered on a slate, "His name is John," as the angel had told him. "Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God." Filled with the Holy Spirit, he then uttered the words before us. They have come to be known as the Benedictus. We will sing a hymn version later in the service. As we continue our celebration of the Christmas miracle we join Zechariah in declaring

PRAISE BE TO THE LORD
I. He saved us
II. Just as He said
III. Enabling us to serve Him

What were you taught to do when opening gifts? It was to say, "Thank you." Sometimes we were so absorbed in enjoying what we had just received that we needed a reminder to do so. Mom or Dad would nudge us, "Now what do you say?" Zechariah leads us in giving thanks as he begins, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people." He praised God for the work of redemption. To redeem means to buy back or pay a ransom to set someone free. The whole world was in slavery to sin. We were by nature children of the devil. We were bound to do his will, which is everything displeasing to God.

"Isn't that slavery over and done?" someone might ask. "We're Christians, God's people." Yet we still struggle with sin daily even as His redeemed children. You and I know that all too well as we slip into the old ways, doing the evil that we hate and that offends God. Our thoughts are not pure nor are our lips. We act selfishly or arrogantly or cruelly. So the gift of redemption is useful still.

This precious gift from our Savior was a most costly one. You can't put it on a credit card and pay it off over time, even at an exorbitant interest rate. It cost Jesus His life. He paid for our sins with His own blood, shed on the cross. There He endured the pains of hell as He was forsaken by His Father. But He paid every last bit of the penalty we deserved.

Zechariah also put it this way: "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." Animals use their horns to protect themselves and to fight. The horn describes God's strong, firm and unwavering help. That's good, for we need it. As the familiar children's song says, "We are weak but He is strong."

With that strength He delivers us from our enemies. While the thoughts of many people at Zechariah's time would have raced to the Romans and ours might center on al-Qaida or terrorists, there are worse enemies that we face. Especially God delivers us from our spiritual enemies. They are all who want to rob us of the salvation that Jesus won for us. The devil and his helpers attack us with temptations and animosity. They try to get us to sin and to stray from the Lord. They fill us with doubts or convince us that God couldn't love or care about someone as sinful and insignificant as us.

The horn of salvation in David's house, Jesus, is more powerful than all our enemies. He has defeated the foe and strengthens us to continue the battle. His power is working in you. Draw on it and win.

II.

His successful work for us shouldn't be a surprise because it is just as He said. The Lord told His people in advance about the Savior. Zechariah's song noted, "As he said through his prophets of long ago." There were numerous messages given by God's spokesmen during the Old Testament. We heard some in Scripture readings during the Advent season, on Christmas Eve, and also today. God promised to send the one who would crush the serpent's head, a great prophet like Moses. He was the Star out of Jacob, the Root of Jesse, born of a virgin in Bethlehem, the descendant of David who would suffer and die but also rise again in victory.

The text referred to Abraham and God's covenant with him. When the Lord called him to leave his homeland and go to Canaan, He told Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, and would be the one through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed. That part of the promise referred to someone greater than Abraham: He was talking about the Savior. God established His covenant not just with Abraham. He sent Jesus for everyone. The children of Abraham are all believers in Jesus Christ, whatever their heritage or ethnic background, including residents of the Lake Mills, Wisconsin area living in 2010.

God fulfilled all those prophecies in Jesus. He was born of Mary, who was in the family line of King David. She was a virgin but miraculously gave birth. She had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit so the baby was God's Son. He was Immanuel, God with us. As the God-man He lived under the law and kept it perfectly, never once disobeying what His Father wanted. He was our substitute, so we receive the credit for His work.

His life of obedience for us was evident soon after His birth, as on the eighth day Jesus was circumcised. What we celebrate as New Year's Day is the festival of the circumcision and naming of Jesus on the church calendar. As the twelve-year-old lad in the temple He showed love for God's Word yet obedience to His earthly parents. We heard that account in the Gospel for last weekend. As an adult He faithfully carried out His public ministry. Serving others, helping with the physical needs of the suffering, and teaching spiritual truths to people were His constant activity.

At the end of His time on this earth Jesus went to the cross as the sacrifice for the world's sins, the innocent for the guilty, paying the price so we wouldn't have to do so. He made it clear when He rose again that the debt was paid in full.

If our Savior kept all those promises and did what it took, you can be sure of the remainder of the promises God makes. He will guard your faith and enable you to meet the challenges of living in the last times. He will deliver you from every evil attack and bring you safely to His heavenly kingdom.

III.

The great news about the promised Savior which Zechariah reviewed produces thankfulness, enabling us to serve Him. He gives us the motive and the power for service. Realizing the blessing of His redemption in the peace we now enjoy and the eternity that awaits us compared with what we had deserved, we are moved to thank our Savior. We owe all we have to Him. Giving thanks is the least we can do. Our gratitude is expressed in action. We dedicate our lives to His service.

Despite having ample reason for praising God with our whole life, we find difficulty in carrying it out. Our sinful flesh sidetracks us to the old ways. God provides the ability. He is the one who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. The power comes through the gospel, which we receive in Word and sacrament. Keep coming for them to refuel your life of service.

Besides prompting our service, Jesus makes it acceptable to our heavenly Father. The song before us noted that we serve without fear. We know God as our loving Father because all has been made right by Jesus. The Lord delights in the service we render, imperfect though it is because Christ fills in the imperfections with His holiness and makes it presentable to God. He leads us to offer joyous service, not slavish duty.

We serve in holiness and righteousness. Yes, we're saints in His sight. Jesus covers us with the righteousness He achieved for us. Our new self seeks God's ways, what meets His approval and not what we deem appropriate.

This service goes on "all our days". We serve our Lord every day, not just during the time we are in God's house. Wherever your activities take you: at work, at school, at home, in the community, there are opportunities to serve your Lord, both as you tell of the Savior and as you live in honesty and integrity and in helpfulness to others. Let your light shine and bring glory to God's name. And don't stop. Never grow weary in serving Christ, who gave all for you. There is no retiring from being a Christian. Your service lasts as long as God grants you the ability. In fact, it will continue forever in heaven. And there it will be perfect.

If that is our desire and God's purpose for us, let's get at it. We have a fresh start in this New Year. Sing out God's praises. Make worship at God's house with your fellow believers a priority and continue offering it at home with your family. Let praise of the Lord be reflected in each contact you have: with family members, neighbors, co-workers, even strangers you meet. Follow right standards of behavior. Use the tongues God has loosened to praise Him. Use your hands and feet and your whole being to honor Him. Remember that He saved you as He promised, enabling you to serve Him. Praise be to the Lord!