

Luke 1:57-80 - "Preparing the Way for Jesus through Zechariah"

Midweek Advent 3 - 2021

This evening our thoughts focus on preparing the way for Jesus through Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, especially through Zechariah's song, which is also known as the Benedictus (Latin for "Blessed be"). As long as you remember what Zechariah's name means, you will remember what his song means. "Zechar" means "remember." "Iah" is short for "Yahweh," the personal name for God. That's what Zechariah's name means, Yahweh (God) remembers.

It you remember, the words of this song were the first words Zechariah spoke after months of complete silence. Zechariah is the priest who saw the angel Gabriel in the temple. Gabriel told Zechariah that he and his wife Elizabeth were going to have a baby boy, whom he was to name John. When Zechariah didn't believe the angel (since he was old and Elizabeth was barren), Gabriel said: "*you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place*" (referring to John's conception and birth).

On the eighth day after the birth of Zechariah and Elizabeth's son, when the people were asking what the baby's name would be, Zechariah wrote down the words: "*His name is John.*" It was then that God enabled Zechariah to speak again. He could speak because God promised through the angel that he would, and Yahweh remembers His promises. But that's not the promise that Zechariah sings about, instead He speaks first about God's promise of a Savior. This is a promise God made back in Genesis 3:15, just after Adam and Eve's fall into sin. God promised that a man born of a woman would bruise, crush, overwhelm the head of Satan along with all his works, thus freeing us from our sins and death.

While God's people waited for this promise to be fulfilled, God, through His prophets, gave His people more and more information about the promised Savior who was to come. These prophecies about the Savior would serve at least two purposes. For one, they would help us to identify the Savior when He comes. And second, they would assure us that God had not forgotten His promises. Instead, Yahweh remembers.

The second part of Zechariah's song, which talks about John's birth, is itself a fulfillment of a promise of God. I can imagine Zechariah singing to baby John: "*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.*" Zechariah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, acknowledges John as a prophet of the Most High, God. And John was not just any prophet of God, he was the prophet foretold of in Isaiah 40 where God promised that He would send someone to "*prepare the way for the Lord*"—for our Savior. Yahweh remembers.

How would John do that? Zechariah tells us that John would "*give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins.*" John the Baptist would certainly let the people know that they were sinners, calling them a "*brood of vipers.*" But he would also tell them that the Savior would forgive or get rid of our sins without getting rid of us.

Zechariah continues: “because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Our Savior comes in “tender mercy,” not just to show us the way out of this world of darkness and death, but to be that way!

These words, when first spoken, were still pretty mysterious. The people were not clear about how it would all take place. We, however, on this side of the cross, see even more clearly how faithful and wonderfully Yahweh remembers His promise to save us. We see how Jesus came in “tender mercy” as the Lamb of God to take our sins upon Himself so that He could get rid of them through His damning death on a cross. But then, through Jesus’ resurrection from the dead in victory over our sins, death and Satan, He enables us to live in the assurance that our just God has punished our sins as He promised, but has also risen from the dead to save us from our sins, as He promised. Yahweh remembers all His promises.

While we continue to wait for the final day of deliverance (and that’s still a little mysterious as to how it will all take place), God continues to come to us today through His Word and Sacrament to assure us that He hasn’t forgotten us—that He is still with us and that He still remembers His promise to take us to our eternal home with Him.

We desperately need God’s help and assurance since there are a growing number of enemies around us, working through people we can see with our eyes, but also in ways that we cannot see; spiritual enemies in us and around us doing all in their power to try and convince us that God doesn’t remember us, that He has given up on us, that He’s not going to return.

Does the enemy, working through people and various circumstances in your life ever convince you of that, causing you to worry or be depressed, as if your future is in doubt?

That’s why God is here this evening, to remind and assure you that He never forgets His promise to be “*with you always to the very end of the age*.” It’s not God who forgets, is it? It’s us! We need God’s help to remember. That’s why God wants us to read and sing His word over and over again, for it’s through His Word that He strengthens our memory and faith in His promise of forgiveness and eternal salvation in Jesus Christ.

As God’s forgiven people He promises to not treat us as our sins deserve, Jesus suffered that treatment. Instead, God is with us and treats us as His dearly beloved children, disciplining us when we need it, but also reminding us of His love and forgiveness.

He never forgets you, but is always with you to bless and keep you. Zachar-iah—Yahweh remembers!

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen