

## In the Name of Jesus

1st Sunday in Advent – December 1, 2019

Sermon Text: Luke 1:67-79 – OVERALL THEME: THE MESSAGE OF ADVENT IS “COME”:

TODAY: GOD’S PEOPLE CRY TO THE LORD: “O COME” Scripture

Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11; Romans 15:4,8-13

Hymns: 55, 62 (4), 75, 64, 705

<sup>67</sup> Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: <sup>68</sup> “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, <sup>70</sup> as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, <sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, <sup>72</sup> to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: <sup>74</sup> to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. <sup>76</sup> 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, <sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, <sup>78</sup> through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; <sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

In Christ, our gracious Advent King, dear friends:

“For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Romans 8:24-25). This is the description the Bible gives of the attitude that Christians of every era of church history have had. Their hearts have been filled by the Holy Spirit with an earnest longing for what their physical eyes can’t see: The fulfillment of their hopes in the long-promised Savior.

All through the times of the Old Testament believers hoped, watched, and waited for this Savior.

- Adam and Eve, to whom the first Gospel promise was given. Oh, how they hoped and trusted God’s promise so implicitly that they even believed (mistakenly) that the first son born to them, Seth, was the Promised One.
- Abraham and Sarah, to whom God gave the promise that they would be the ancestors of the Savior, though they were well beyond child-bearing years.
- Isaac ... Jacob ... David.
- The Israelites, to whom Moses gave the promise: “**The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from among your brethren**” (Deuteronomy 18:15-16). He will speak to you in winsome, tender tones of sweet Gospel, not with the frightening threatenings of the Law you heard from Him on Mount Sinai.

Centuries passed. The time drew near. We hear about more hoping done by God’s believers of the New Testament.

- The devout man of God, Simeon, who was waiting for the consolation of Israel.
- The prophetess Anna, who worshiped the Lord night and day, who looked forward anxiously to the coming redemption which she knew God would provide soon.
- All those hoards of people flocking out to the Jordan to be baptized, who asked John the Baptist: “Are you the Christ?”

Can we not relate to what those believers of old were feeling? Is there not also deep down in our hearts an earnest longing for our Christian hopes to be realized in the Savior born at Bethlehem, who has also promised to come in glory to receive us into heaven on the Last Day? Advent is a season for crying out to the Lord in great eagerness and hope:

Oh, come, Oh, come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear.

That is our Advent theme this year.

- On this first Sunday in Advent we will discuss the longing which the Holy Spirit plants in hearts to cry out to the Lord: **“O COME!”**
- Next Sunday, Lord-willing, we will consider the Savior’s response to our cry (to the rejoicing of our hearts): **“BEHOLD, I COME!”**
- On the third Sunday we will hear the birth announcement: **“THE LORD IS COME.”**
- Then, on the final Advent Sunday, we’ll hear the wondrous Christmas invitation: **“O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL. SEE IN THE MANGER YOUR SAVIOR AND KING.”**

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Our sermon message, on this first Advent Sunday, is based on the “Benedictus” of Zacharias. This was the song of thanksgiving that Zacharias uttered on the occasion of the circumcision of his son, John the Baptist. The song received its name from its first words in Latin (*Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel”). Filled with the Holy Spirit Zacharias was moved to do just that. To *bless* (or *praise*) the Lord. And why? Because he had been led to the realization that all the hopes which God’s people had for all those years were soon to be fulfilled! His newborn son was the one God picked to get the people ready for the Savior (by giving them a knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins).

As we read Zacharias’ Benedictus something we can notice is the *certainty* of his hope. We see how he speaks about God’s act of redeeming His people in the soon-to-appear Savior *in the past tense*:

- **“He has visited and redeemed His people.”**
- **“He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David.”**

This is the confession of a person whose faith is so implicit, so rock-solid, that as far as he’s concerned, the Messiah has already been born and has already completed His saving work!

This is the faith we pray for this Advent season. We ask our God to plant in our hearts such childlike confidence in His promises that, as far as we are concerned, all the hopes we have

as Christians in the Savior will be, in fact, already have been, realized!

What hopes? Zacharias articulates them in his song in this way: **“that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us.”** He believed, we do too, that Jesus was born to crush our spiritual foe, the roaring lion, Satan, who’s on the prowl, seeking whom he may devour, seeking to rob us of our hope and get us to anchor our hopes in the passing pleasures of sin and the fading baubles of this temporary world.

Isn’t it true that we also are confronted by enemies (we might call them “allies” of the evil one) in the form of difficulties we encounter in our life in this world. Things like health concerns, financial woes, family worries, and so forth. All these threaten to steal away or, at least, diminish our Christian joy. How we stand in need of a Savior to come to us and rescue us from these enemies! How blessed we are to know that He can! He will! He already has!

He comes the prisoners to release, in Satan's bondage held.  
The gates of brass before Him burst, the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,  
And with the treasures of His grace to enrich the humble poor.

[TLH 66:2,4]

Right in the midst of the turmoil swirling around us in the world and the worries of our daily lives. What a wonderful Savior He is!

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Zacharias goes on to say in his song that God will send Jesus to us in order **“to perform the mercy promised to our fathers.”** What mercy is he referring to? In one of our carol favorites (“Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”) we speak of *“peace on earth and mercy mild.”* Have you ever given thought to why God’s grace to us in Jesus is described in this carol as *“mercy mild”* (besides the fact that it rhymes with *“God and sinners reconciled”* in the next line). To understand, think about what its *opposite* would be. Wouldn’t the opposite of *“mercy mild”* be *“justice harsh”*? That’s what we deserve for our transgressions against God’s Law. We know that if He dealt with us according to His harsh justice we would have no hope (we could have ourselves no merry little Christmas). But what did our God do? He found a way to deal with us, not according to His harsh justice but His tender mercy. He says to us in love: **“Comfort, yes, comfort My people! Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her that her warfare is ended, her iniquity pardoned; for she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins”** (Isaiah 40:1-2). Double *what*? Punishment? No! Double mercy! Double compassion! Double grace in Christ! What a loving God we have!

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Zacharias goes on to rejoice (in his glad song) in the knowledge that God was going to **“perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham.”** This, too, is a big part of our Advent joy. We know that just as God kept His promises to His people long ago, so He will keep His promises to

us! He won't go back on His Word.

In another carol favorite ("O Little Town of Bethlehem") we sing about how *"the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."* Think on the meaning of those words for a moment. Ask yourself: How were the hopes and fears of all the years met in the sleepy little Bethlehem town on that "O Holy Night" long ago? Well, don't you suppose that all through the long four thousand year period of watching, waiting, and hoping (leading up to the first Christmas) that God's people (conscious of their unworthiness and their miserable failure to live up to His holy standards) were tempted to wonder and be afraid that God would decide not to send them a Messiah after all? I'm sure many were filled with worry: What if God reneges on His promises? What if, when the Messiah appears on earth, it will be with a display of power and righteous anger like He did at Sinai?

Advent's message is that all such fears which believers of old entertained and we too are tempted to have (to think: *"I am unworthy to have God send me a Savior"* Or: *"Jesus may have been sent for other people but not me"*) ... I say, the message of Advent is that all these worries are totally unfounded. Jesus comes to us not in wrath but in love, just as God promised to the believers of old. This, too, is what we rejoice in – and praise God for! – during the yuletide season.

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Finally, let us give thought to the words from the Benedictus, where Zacharias speaks of the overarching purpose for the Messiah's coming to earth: **"that we might serve Him in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."**

This is yet one more reason for our Advent joy (and why we cry out to Him "O come to us, Lord Jesus!"). We want Him to come to us in order that we may have the privilege of serving Him with works of love without any fear. That is the ultimate reason why He came here, so that He might **"redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works"** (Titus 2:14). Jesus descended from high at the first Christmas in order that, through faith in Him, we might be cleansed of our sins and be a holy people qualified and eager to serve Him joyfully ... in the family circle at home ... in our fellow Christians at church ... in our marriage relationship ... in the people around us at our place of employment ... in our teachers and classmates at school ... wherever we may be. All as thank you for the mercy He has shown us. Because of His vanquishing our enemies, for His blessing us with a living hope, for His dispelling our fears, so that we might be His forever.

So then, let us make this our Advent prayer:

Lord Jesus, in all the activities of the season (the decking of the halls ... the arranging of light displays ... the shopping ... card sharing ... cookie baking ... gift giving ... may it all be done in a spirit of thanksgiving for all You have done for us, our Lord Immanuel, in Your first Advent ... and in joyful anticipation of Your Second Advent when You shall come to take us to the place of perfect joy, where we shall serve You in perfect love forever in yonder heavenly mansions. Amen.