

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

## LUKE 1:67-79

## AN ADVENT MESSAGE FOR THE ADVENT MESSENGER !

*Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:*

*“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people,  
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us, in the house of His servant David,  
As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began,  
That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us,  
To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant,  
The oath which He swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
Might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life*

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

Have you ever gone to the mailbox to find a letter or package, that your dad, mom, brother, or sister were waiting for? There's joy in being able to go into the house and say, "Dad, Mom, your package came!" It's great to relay good news. You wouldn't be too popular if you just plopped it on the table and never said a word.

In our text for today, a man named Zacharias has good news to deliver and share with his 8-DAY old son, and with us, regarding his son's life's work. This son, the little baby John the Baptist, was the promised forerunner of the Savior. His role would be to prepare the hearts of the people for Jesus' presence and work--"Repent and be baptized!" he would proclaim. Father Zacharias had a message for John. The words of Zacharias were not his own. *He was filled with the Holy Spirit.* Zacharias himself served as a prophet and messenger of God.

**A.** The first section of His words explain the joyful, and long-awaited, state of affairs at hand! Zacharias blesses/praises *the Lord God of Israel*, the one who was Lord of their forefathers still going back 1000 and even 2000 years—names still known to them. Do you know who your ancestors were 200 years ago? Probably not. Zacharias praises this Lord because *He has visited and redeemed His people.* God was coming to visit, to look in on, His people, the people He had chosen from which the Savior would be born. To "visit His people" means "to look in on"—much like a retired business owner might say, "I visit the office every day." God was coming to visit and to help his people in dire straits, to rescue them, deliver them, redeem and ransom them by paying the "captive price" to set them free. God's Son, Jesus, was coming to take away the guilt of the world and of each soul.

Zacharias says, *God has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David.* The "horn" of an animal is its means of safety and its protection. A horn wards off attackers and becomes a refuge, a "place" and means, of safety for those dependent on the beast. God was raising up this horn of rescue and safety from within Judah and Israel itself, from the royal family of King David—the David who had defeated Goliath with a stone and a sling. Isn't it special when a hero or rescuer comes from "in-house"? Imagine a ranch going to ruin because the second and third generations aren't very good at running it. But then a great-grandson arises who has a bent for it. When this "in-house" member of the team, one from within the family, comes to restore the prosperity and success of the operation, what a joy it is for the family! It's so much more fulfilling than hiring someone from the outside to "make a go" of it. Jesus, who would be born 6 months after John the Baptist, and who was a descendant of royal King David, would be that in-house Rescuer!

Was this just good luck or a fine turn of fate? No. This was God's plan from the beginning. Zacharias continues, *As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began.* From the foundation of the world, Christ's sacrifice for us was underway. From the first sin, God made it known that He would grant forgiveness and salvation in the one Who would bruise Satan's head. In this champion we would *be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us.* Christ came to save His people, you included, from all enemies and those who hate them—physical and otherwise. God knows when the time and situation for rescue is right. Who hates you? Certain people on earth? But who hates you more than anyone else? Satan! Satan hates

you! He doesn't come across that way. He comes across as your friend—he's easier to get along with than God and granting more fun along the earthly way. But he hates you. He wants you to suffer in hell, with Him, forever. That's not love, that's hate. He wants to separate you from the blessings of God, from forgiveness in Jesus, and from Life in heaven. Jesus saves you from the hand of Him who hates you.

Zacharias says, *The time has come for the Lord to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham, to grant us.* Abraham was the forefather of the Israelite Jewish people. 2000 years earlier God promised and covenanted with Abraham that from his family *all people on earth would be blessed*, meaning the Savior of all the world would come from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel); then from Judah/the Jews one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Lord was keeping His promise that, *being delivered from the hand of our enemies, we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.* God's rescue would not just be an earthly rescue from earthly foes, but a spiritual rescue from spiritual foes, granting freedom to serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness—all sins fully forgiven.

This Great News, promised for centuries, was about to be brought to reality in Christ Himself at that time. Isn't this exactly where you stand today?—now at the threshold of Christmas, about to recognize, again, the arrival of the Savior, your Redeemer, your horn of salvation, sparing you from the Foe who hates you. Through Him you have holiness and righteousness every day now and hereafter. Zacharias' words are a reminder of your great state of affairs in Christ right now this Advent and Christmas season. This is a great time of the year!

**B.** The second portion of Zacharias' words were spoken directly to his son, John. *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.* John, you will have the honored position of coming with the Good News and telling the people "He's here! The One for whom you have been waiting is here!" John, you will *give knowledge of salvation to [God's] people by the remission of their sins.* Not a physical, political, social rescuer; but a spiritual rescuer—bringing the knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins! A sure and certain "knowledge," not just a theory. "Salvation"—the state of being entirely safe and sound, not just a temporary recess or break from oppression. In this Savior trespasses, iniquities, guilt, offenses, sins, SENT AWAY. "Sent away" is the root meaning of the word translated FORGIVENESS here. Those huge spots on God's radar screen that block your way, those cancerous tumors on God's MRI machine that man certain death, all are sent away, removed, gone, forever! God does not just look the other way, or close one eye or both eyes. Those sins are gone. John, you will have a most privileged position and ministry!

And how did all this come to pass? *Through the tender mercy of our God.* Literally and a little more colorfully--through "the bowels of compassion" of our God. You know how mercy and compassion don't just well up in your head, they are felt deep in your "gut." Emotions are felt on your insides. God's bowels of compassion, God's tender mercy, reaches out in compassion to us all. This is the message John would be privileged to deliver. The helper has come.

Or, as Zacharias also says, *The Dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.* Think of a traveler on foot trying to get out of dangerous territory, sitting in the dark of night, waiting for break of day, so he can travel on. What joy and relief daybreak, Dayspring, brings! Or think of being lost and alone in the darkness of a cave, waiting for rescuers to bring light and help. What joy when they arrive! Think of being overwhelmed in the darkness of Death, caused by your own sins. But then the Dayspring of forgiveness, light, and Life in Jesus shines into your soul through the message and Word of God! That's the joy of Christmas! *To guide our feet into the way of peace.* No longer lost, alone, and unsure which way to turn. In Christ is the way of peace—now and forever in heaven. Do you see the privileged role John the Baptist would have, in spite of those who hated Him? Zacharias had a great encouragement for John.

Zacharias has a great encouragement for you too. The same state of affairs and the same privilege that Christ's presence on earth brought to John, it also brings to you. You, like John the Baptist, are a messenger, on a smaller-scale. What will your role be this Advent and Christmas season? Baker, present maker, decorator, master scheduler, money earner and extra money earner, costume wearer, song leader, snowman maker, jolly old fellow, a car-driver for miles and miles, a friendly and warm hand shaker? It's exhausting, isn't it? Or will your role this Advent season be sharing *the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins through tender mercy of our God?* If it's only the first list that you fulfill, you don't have much for good news to bring "from the mailbox." If it's the second, you have a most privileged Advent role and great news "from the mailbox." You are pointing souls to Jesus, their Dayspring, their Life and Peace. A Great Advent Message, for every Advent Messenger!

So be it! Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---