

Jesus, Horn of Salvation (The Song of Zechariah)

Luke 1:57-80

Key Verse: 1:68,69

by Steve Stasinis

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David..."

Merry Christmas! Are you merry? We want to be. But Christmas can be a difficult time for many of us. Some of us lost loved ones this year. Some of us lost our job, or worry how we will find a job. Some feel lost in a leadership transition, or are in a deadlock with a spouse. Sometimes someone we love is in deep trouble, and there is nothing we can do. Other times we are weakened by chronic failures and condemnation, or lose our heart to something. We can put on a mask smile, or simply try to ignore the issue, But eventually it comes back up, sweeping our feet out from under us. Has anyone felt weak and uncertain, fearful and doubting? If you haven't, someone near you has. We need a Savior; someone who is able to fight for us, to deliver us, to rescue us. Jesus is that Savior.

I. The Birth of John the Baptist (57-66)

Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God (6), but they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old (7). When we are young, we think nothing is impossible, and if I just work at it I can accomplish anything I put my mind to. But conceiving a child was impossible for this couple no matter how righteous, holy, smart, or hard-working they were. But God had mercy on them. In due time, Elizabeth had her baby, a son (57), just as the Lord had said she would. This child was the gift of God, the grace of God, the clear intervention of God into the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth. God fulfilled his promise and words to this family.

The neighbors and relatives didn't think it was dumb luck, an accident, or a reward for the couple's righteous living. This child was the great mercy of God on Elizabeth. So none of them were bitter or jealous, but all shared the joy of Elizabeth. God's unique mercy was revealed; his hand at work among them through John's birth.

As I prepared this message I thought about Barnabas Kramarczyk. Adam and Cheryl married by God's grace and mercy about 6 years ago. Soon they began to pray for a baby. That is normal to most families. But a baby didn't come. Our community all prayed. But our prayer couldn't conceive a child, nor could all our encouragement and advice. But when God chose to reveal his great mercy, in his time and way, Cheryl became pregnant. Barnabas is now 8 months old. The Lord's great mercy was revealed in this birth. His birth was an answer to prayer, bringing comfort and joy to our entire UIC community.

But there are others among us who are still praying and waiting. I really want to encourage you: The Lord's hand is not weak, nor is he indifferent. Our God is a God of mercy. No matter how impossible it may seem, there is hope in our merciful God. After Judah was born, we prayed and tried for five years, enduring two miscarriages, before Josiah came. I deeply acknowledged that life belongs to God. He gives to whom he wants to give, and he withholds according to his own plan and council. Let's find hope in the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, however impossible our situation may seem. We cannot earn God's grace or intervention. But let's pray and have hope in a God of great mercy.

After eight days, the whole community came to circumcise the boy, and to name him after his father, Zechariah (59). Though they shared the couple's joy, the neighbors and relatives were not aware of God's calling on this little baby. Wanting to name him Zechariah was a loving gesture to his father, who had been struck mute by the angel of the

Lord. This was a nice idea, but it was not God's idea. Elizabeth his mother spoke up, and said, "No! He is to be called John." So they asked Zechariah, using gestures (62). Perhaps he was deaf as well as mute. Zechariah also clearly wrote: "His name is John (63)."

Zechariah and Elizabeth responded differently than the people of their community. We learn to respond to God's great mercy by overcoming the momentum to think humanly or self-centeredly, and instead to remember God's word and God's plan. His blessing in sending John was not a reward for their faithfulness, or an answer to their prayer. His mercy was much greater than that. God was including them in his world redemptive history. John's birth had eternal consequences. Do we see God's blessing and mercies on us from that point of view? Probably of all blessings, having this perspective for our children is the most difficult. Yet Zechariah and Elizabeth had a clear prayer topic for their son John, based on God's word. Do you have a key verse and prayer topic for your children? Let's ask God to help us see our children from his eternal perspective and plan.

Now let's think of some of the results of God's mercy on this family. Look at verse 64. "Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God." Maybe he sang his favorite hymn, or simply said, "Hallelujah!" Over and over. Perhaps his first words were the Holy Spirit inspired prophecy recorded in verses 67-80. Taking a step back, what a thing to see: Elderly Elizabeth conceiving and having a baby, her husband being silenced, and then healed. These were evident signs of the Lord's hand at work in their time. No one missed it. All the neighbors were filled with awe (65). Everyone was talking about it and wondering about it. We pray for a revival in our families, in our church, on our campuses, in our nation, in our world. This will only happen by the great mercy of our God. We cannot do it. But God, who had mercy on Zechariah and Elizabeth, may have mercy on us. May his hand be evident among us.

II. Zechariah's Song (67-80)

Verse 67 reads, "His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:" Although called Zechariah's Song, this is really a prophecy inspired by the Holy Spirit which is all about the coming of King Jesus. I want to pause here to think about the power of silence in Zechariah's life.

Zechariah had served as a priest faithfully for many years, and was righteous in God's sight. But when God intervened in his life, he became unbelieving, so God disciplined him. He likely condemned himself: "Why didn't I just believe!" He couldn't speak, and probably couldn't hear either, so he couldn't vent or be consoled. This was a rare time of deep silence. Although God's discipline, it was for his good. As we read his Song, there are elements of Hannah's Song (1Sa 2:1,10), Songs of David (2Sa 22:3; Ps 18:2; Ps 107:14), the prophets (Jer 23:5-6; Mic 7:20; Exe 16:60; Jer 31:34; Mal 4:2; Isa 9:2), and even Genesis (22:16-18). Although his ears and mouth didn't work, his eyes did. He saw the events in the world newly: virgin Mary pregnant, and his own wife pregnant. The Holy Spirit inspired him to know what God was doing in his day. His focus shifted from himself to God. This time of silence and study, meditation and isolation became the time for God to broaden his perspective. The fruit of God's discipline on Zechariah reaches us today as we still study this prophecy and learn invaluable truths about Jesus.

When we started this Fall semester, I had a schedule written out, and clear goals for my UIC ministry. But instead we found out Amy was pregnant, and she became very ill. For three months she stayed on our living room couch, trying to sip liquids and keep from vomiting, while being pumped with medicine. My plans all had to be scrapped, in order to care for my family. I often felt frustrated and helpless. But God had a reason for this. My eyes began to see what I hadn't seen. I realized how much my wife did around the house and caring for the children, while working full time as a pharmacist: The cooking and cleaning and baths and so many things that I took for granted. She never complained, never despaired, never sought recognition. I realized how little I invested in being one with her, or even showing appreciation for all she did, being so caught up in what I was doing. I also saw how my young boys need their father involved daily in their lives. I'm totally helpless to lead this family without his grace and mercy daily. I

cannot take it for granted any longer. May God accept my repentance, receive the glory through this coming child, and help Amy and I to be one.

Now let's get into Zechariah's prophecy regarding Jesus. I want to think about it around three major themes: What the Lord has done, what Jesus, the horn of salvation does, and how we may receive him.

First, praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel (68-73). Verse 68 reads, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them." Although this was the occasion of his miracle son John's birth, Zechariah only spends two verses on John. The rest of his song is dedicated to praising the Lord, the God of Israel. He didn't praise God only for personal blessings, but for the Lord's mercy on all his people. That time was very dark in Israel, due to Roman occupation and corrupt religious leaders. But Zechariah praised God. He saw God's fulfilment of his promises to David (69), through all the prophets (70), his mercy and remembrance to all their ancestors (72) based on his holy covenant (72) and the oath to Abraham (73). As God promised, he came to his people and redeemed them. God had this plan for his people from the beginning, that all nations would be blessed through them (Ge 22:17-18). They would be for him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). Although they were too weak and failed to live up to this on their own, in God's own zeal (Isa 9:7b) he himself accomplished this in Jesus Christ, in Mary's womb. In this little child God "... has come to his people and has redeemed them." He redeemed them from their failure, fulfilling all his purposes and promises to Israel.

How did God do this? Verse 69 reads, "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David..." In the NIV footnote, Horn here symbolizes a strong king. In the House of David means he would be God's king promised to reign over David's throne eternally (2Sa 7:12). God foretold the coming of such a mighty king in passages like Psalm 132:17-18 which reads, "Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one. 18 I will clothe his enemies with shame, but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown." and also in Zechariah 23:5-6, which reads, "'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.'" Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Jesus is the horn of salvation. Jesus is therefore our Mighty Savior King, The LORD, Our Righteous Savior!

Second, what Jesus the horn of salvation does (71-75). Jesus is mighty, but he uses his power to save. Jesus came to us to bring salvation from our enemies and all who hate us (71). Our enemy is not flesh and blood (Eph 6:12). Satan is our enemy, who is prowling around looking for someone to devour (1Pe 5:8). Satan is described in the Bible as having seven heads and ten horns. Zechariah twice uses the word "hand" to describe the enemy's work. Satan is not a passive enemy, but has a hand in what goes on in our world. He actively seeks to destroy our lives, families and communities. We see his work come out often in relationships. Satan takes advantage of our weaknesses working through accusations and condemnation, wanting us to focus on each other's weaknesses and complain or slander instead of encouraging and building up. Sometimes he uses a miscommunication out of a generational, gender or cultural difference to plant doubt or misunderstanding about a person's motives. Trust relationships are broken. In this way he isolates people, and destroys them, like a lion targets the weak straggler of the herd. The reason Jesus came was to destroy the devil's work (1Jn 3:8). Jesus shared in our humanity so that by his death he might break the power of the devil and free those held in slavery by fear of death (Heb 2:14-15). R.A. Dickey recently won the Cy Young award, a top honor for baseball pitchers. In his childhood he had been crushed under the hand of the devil when he was sexually abused. This could have destroyed his life. But he met Jesus, the Horn of Salvation. Jesus rescued him. When asked about it, he responded, "...although the evils that are manifested in this world are tough to reconcile a lot of times, that doesn't mean God can't use them in some way. The sexual abuse, for instance--because my wounds were deep the healing has been great. I now have a very intimate relationship with a living God whom I believe in. The deeper the wound and the more healing that has to take place, the greater God becomes." Only Jesus has this power to rescue us from Satan.

But there is another dimension to this battle that is not external, but internal. Paul describes our weakness in Romans 7. "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, and what I hate I do. ...18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do -- this I keep on doing.24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" In relationship with Jesus, our mighty Savior King, we will experience deliverance from this inner weakness. Jesus rescued a young woman from an immoral life, and helped her finish school and begin working. The work environment was immoral, and drew her into their flirtatious activities. She felt ashamed that she was acting this way. But God's word in Ephesians convinced her to come into the light by confessing. Jesus gave her strength after that to make a contrast at work, and her story encouraged others.

Jesus enables us to serve him. Although we are weak in many ways, we can be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power (Eph 6:10). We were created to serve God. This is the good we really wanted to do, but couldn't due to our weak flesh. Discipline fails, willpower is limited, and our life is too short. But Jesus, our mighty king, enables us to serve him in three ways: First, he enables us to serve him without fear. Actually, there are so many kinds of fear that cripple us inwardly, such as fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of losing family or friends, fear of being alone. In this economic hard time there is fear of bankruptcy, or fear of losing our job. Although we long to serve Christ, these fears are overpowering. Many of these fears come because we are depending on ourselves. But Jesus enables us to serve him without fear, trusting in his power and ability, not ours.

Jesus enables us to serve him in holiness and righteousness. Holiness is the character of God. Jesus enables us grow in God's character, compassion, mercy, love, and sacrifice. We become set apart, with a new identity as his dearly loved and chosen people (Col 3:12). This growing in holiness makes us salt and light in our world. Jesus' blood was shed to forgive our sins and impart his righteousness to us. Righteousness has to do with the lifestyle Jesus enables us to live. Jesus enables us to walk in love (Eph 5:1-2), purity (Eph 5:3-6), discernment (Eph 5:8-10), and wisdom (Eph 5:15-16). The good we always wanted to do but couldn't is not only possible, but increasingly becomes our lifestyle. A friend of mine grew up rebellious, and pleasure seeking. Against her parents' wishes, she began dating, and fell into sin. But Jesus saved her, and called her to serve him. Now she is growing in purity, discipline, obedience, and as a Bible teacher and example. This is only possible because of Jesus, the horn of salvation. Our continual desire and prayer to be more like Jesus each day is not possible in our own strength. But Jesus, our mighty king, enables us to serve him in holiness and righteousness.

Jesus also enables us to serve before him all our days. His calling isn't for a moment or a period, and there is no irrelevant or unimportant person, no matter how young or old. In Jesus, we all have a part in serving his kingdom and world salvation plan. Last Monday God used children to open our hearts to the Christmas season. Dr. John Jun, tho in his 70's, has been traveling serving CME, and Dr. Joseph and Esther Chung went to Uganda as a missionary. Jesus keeps life fresh and exciting. Do you feel weak, or harassed? God has raised up a horn of salvation for us.

Third, John's ministry: how to receive Jesus (76-80). John would be a prophet of the Most High (76). As the forerunner he would go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Jesus by giving his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins (77). What people most need is the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Of course, no one likes to think of themselves as a sinner. Rather we think our suffering is because of others' sins. But the knowledge of salvation begins with recognizing our real need. We need the forgiveness of our sins, and in Jesus God has provided this. Only God's people in Jesus' kingdom have this knowledge, knowing their sins are forgiven.

This is the tender mercy of our God to provide Jesus as a rising sun. The rising sun is the symbol of hope for life and the future, gradually revealed across the earth. This hope is found only in Jesus Christ. He gives us a living hope that sustains us over the long haul. This hope in Jesus shines on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death. Before Jesus comes into our lives, we live in a world of darkness in the shadow of death. The surety of death and the meaninglessness of life cast a dark shadow over many people's lives. Many have noble desire and dreams, but no

strength or hope to carry it out. We read about suicides on our college campuses. People with many friends, money, and a bright future end their life. They have no hope. But Jesus, the rising sun brings hope. Do you see the harassed and helpless around you? In his tender mercy God has sent the Rising Sun Jesus to shine into our darkness.

Some of us are not merry this Christmas, but grumpy, unhappy and complaining. We want to see a beautiful world that is full of God's wonders, but get stuck focusing on the darkness. We need the rising sun to rise in our hearts this Christmas. Are you restless? Do you feel powerless and weak? Is there a darkness in your mind and heart, or in someone you know? Let's admit our powerlessness, and look to Jesus, who is the horn of salvation, our mighty king. Let's look to Jesus, the Rising Sun, and let his light remove all darkness.