

## Sermon Followed by Service

December 26, 2021

Luke 1:67-79

What did you get for Christmas? Did you know before you got it? Did you shake it, thump it, sneak a peek? Zechariah knew what he was getting. He didn't do any shaking, thumping, or sneaking a peek; but he knew. And what Zechariah was getting for Christmas had him fired up!

How so? For the past nine months before our lesson, Zechariah had been mute; he couldn't talk, couldn't say a word. Can you imagine how frustrating that would be? Worse, for the past who knows how many years, Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were childless; the pain and disappointment would have been so heavy. But now Zechariah has a new baby in the house, his first-born. Can you imagine how fired up, how proud he must be? After nine months of not being able to say a word, now Zechariah can talk. And what does he say? What's the first thing out of his mouth? Not "I can talk again!" Not "Look at my baby!" But "Praise be to God; I've got Jesus!" Even before Zechariah saw him, even before Jesus was born: "Praise be to God; I've got Jesus!" Better than getting his voice back. Better than having a new baby boy. "Praise be to God; I've got Jesus!"

*Puts me to shame. Ask me what I got for Christmas and so often the first things I think of are cards and cookies, gift cards and candy, cash and checks. And for all those things: "Praise be to God! God is so good!" But the best Christmas gift I've ever received ... not always so quick to remember. What helps you keep perspective? What helps you remember Christmas is nothing without Christ?*

Why? Put yourself in Zechariah's place. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth have their hearts with God. Yet their hearts hurt. As children of Abraham they look around at their country in shame: "This isn't the way it's supposed to be." The line of great King David was but a rotting stump. Instead, the glory of the land was the work of fake-Jew Herod the Great, a paranoid tyrant bullying, terrorizing his people. Looking around at those people, Zechariah and Elizabeth would have felt shame and fear - "This isn't the way it's supposed to be." Looking around, they would have seen their neighbors on the losing end of a culture war. The Jewish way of life was under attack; God's way of life was under attack. "You've got to fit in with the world. If you want to be successful, you won't find success in following God. If you want to be somebody ... if you want to get somewhere, you've got to fit in with the world." Even in the church - Zechariah was a priest;

he got to serve in the Temple - even in the church Zechariah would have felt shame - “This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be.” The priesthood had become corrupt, politically corrupt with bribery and assassination, religiously corrupt with priests who cared more about power and prestige than truth and love; put it together, they cared more about self than about God. As a man of God, Zechariah would have hurt: “This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be.”

*Where do you see: “This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be”?*

As a man of God, a man whose heart was right with God, Zechariah wouldn’t have been pointing fingers just out at the world around him. He would have hurt over the corruption in his own heart, the ways he fit in with the world instead of walking with God. Zechariah knew getting his voice back wouldn’t fix that. Finally having a child, a son, wouldn’t fix that. “Praise be to God! Jesus was coming!”

Do you see yourself with Zechariah and Elizabeth? Look around at our world - in the news, on TV, in music, and video games - what does the world think of God’s life and love? Look at our church - for some, always more talk than walk - for all of us, can any of us we say we’re living up to what we’re supposed to be? As people whose hearts are with God, we know “This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be! We aren’t the way we’re supposed to be.”

All the Christmas stuff ... the microscope I begged for, the train cars I wowed over, the orange robot we fought for, the money we long for ... all that stuff didn’t, doesn’t, don’t, and won’t fix that. None of the stuff of this world can.

*What stuff of this world do we use to try to make our life right?*

Zechariah knew what could, would, can, and does make life right. He saw Jesus coming to set his people free - free from Herod, free from corruption in the church, free from slavery to society (“you better fit in or else”); even better, Zechariah saw Jesus coming to set his people free, free from guilt, free from God’s judgment.

Zechariah saw: God had set Christmas in motion; and not just Christmas, but Good Friday and Easter, Judgment Day and Heaven’s Homecoming Day - God had set them all in motion - and nothing could or would stop them. Already Zechariah saw Jesus’ work as good as done. Herod, more Herods, and Pilate couldn’t stop Jesus. The Pharisees and Sadducees, the chief priests and teachers of the law

couldn't stop Jesus. All the tempting of the world, all the bullying, all the peer pressure of the world couldn't stop Jesus.

As God's True Priest, Jesus would offer himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. As God's True King, Jesus would put sin and Satan where they belong - out. As God's True Prophet, Jesus would bring God's promise - peace! And he did!

We don't always see that, do we? Around us, even inside us - it's still not the way it's supposed to be; we're not the way we're supposed to be. But already with Jesus you have treasures you just can't find under a Christmas tree. With Jesus, you are loved even on your worst of days. With Jesus you are somebody; no matter what other people think of you, you are precious and powerful in the family of God. With Jesus, even when your world is upside down, you have God and his angels looking out for you. With Jesus, no matter what the economy does, no matter what COVID does, you have a better future coming - you have heaven coming! Not only has God put it in motion - we get to think like Zechariah - it's as good as done! Just last month we heard Paul tell us: **“There is nothing in all creation that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”**

What does that mean for us? Zechariah would say: “Peace and freedom!” You hear it in Zechariah's song: “I've got Jesus. I'm redeemed; I'm released! I'm free!” Free for what? “Free to go my own way”? No, that wasn't it, was it? That's not what Zechariah said. We're not free to be free from God; we're free to be free with God! How did Zechariah put it? We are free **“to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”** Zechariah had seen God's holy angel; Zechariah knew fear in the face of God's holiness. Now, with Jesus, we get to stand before God without fear. We get to walk with God, talk with God, work with God - not with some “have to” hanging over us, not with some “you better get it right” hanging over us. We get to walk and talk and work with God - without fear.

Without fear, we get to walk and talk like Jesus, without fear of what the world thinks. Without fear, we get to be kind and gentle like Jesus, without fear of being taken advantage of. Without fear, we get to be generous giving like Jesus, without fear of not having enough. Without fear, we get to raise our children as God's children, we get to serve God's family, without some FOMO fear that we're going to miss out on something better from this world. Without fear, we get to live differently than the rest of the world; we get to live life the way it is supposed to be

- our heart in God's heart, God's heart in our heart. In other words, we get to live in peace! Why? "Praise be to God! We've got Jesus!" Amen.

*Attach a Bible-promise to each of the "without fear" statements in that last paragraph.*

*What does it mean to you that you get to live "heart in heart" with God?*

# St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

*A Family Connecting in Christ*



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## The Service

### OPENING HYMN

*"From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"*

**Hymn 331 v. 1-7**

"From heav'n above to earth I come to bear good news to ev'ry home;  
glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will say and sing:

"To you this night is born a child of Mary, chosen virgin mild;  
this little child of lowly birth shall be the joy of all the earth.

"This is the Christ, our God most high, who hears your sad and bitter cry;  
he will himself your Savior be from all your sins to set you free.

"He will on you the gifts bestow prepared by God for all below,  
that in his kingdom bright and fair, you may with us his glory share.

"These are the signs which you shall mark:  
the swaddling clothes and manger dark.  
There you will find the infant laid  
by whom the heav'ns and earth were made."

How glad we'll be to find it so! Then with the shepherds let us go  
to see what God for us has done in sending us his own dear Son.

Come here, my friends, lift up your eyes, and see what in the manger lies.  
Who is this child, so young and fair? It is the Christ Child lying there.

### + CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

- M: The grace of our Lord †Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship  
of the Holy Spirit be with you.  
C: **And also with you.**

## CONFESSION OF SINS

M: We confess our sins and ask for forgiveness.

Almighty Lord God, we have gathered today to thank you for the gift of your Son, our Savior. We need a Savior, for we have sinned greatly against you. But your mercies never end; they are new to us every day. So at your command and promise, we ask you to forgive us.

C: **O holy and most merciful Father, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: God, have mercy on me a sinner!**

M: I bring you good news of great joy! A Savior has been born for you! Jesus has destroyed the work of the devil; he has set you free to live with God. He has done what we couldn't do - he has made us right with God! Through Jesus you are forgiven and saved to be God's child. Glory to God in the highest!

C: **Amen.**

M: In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord.

## HYMN

*"All My Heart Again Rejoices"*

**Hymn 329**

All my heart again rejoices as I hear far and near sweetest angel voices.  
"Christ is born!" their choirs are singing till the air  
ev'rywhere now with joy is ringing.

Hear! The Conqueror has spoken: "Now the foe,  
sin and woe, death and hell are broken!"  
God is man, man to deliver, and the Son now is one with our blood forever.

Should we fear our God's displeasure, who, to save,  
freely gave his most precious treasure?  
To redeem us he has given his own Son  
from the throne of his might in heaven.

See the Lamb, our sin once taking to the cross,  
suff'ring loss, full atonement making.  
For our life his own he tenders, and his grace  
all our race fit for glory renders.

Softly from his lowly manger Jesus calls one and all,  
"You are safe from danger. Children, from the sins that grieve you  
you are freed; all you need I will surely give you."

Come, then, banish all your sadness! One and all,  
great and small; come with songs of gladness;  
we shall live with him forever there on high  
in that joy which will vanish never.

**PRAYER OF THE DAY** (*spoken together*)

**Almighty God, in mercy you sent your one and only Son to take upon himself our human nature. By his gracious coming deliver us from the corruption of our sin and transform us into the likeness of his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

**FIRST LESSON**

**Galatians 4:4-7**

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba, Father.*" So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

**P:** The Word of the Lord.

**C:** **Thanks be to God.**

**CHILDREN'S TALK**



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

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

#### EXPLANATION OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> ARTICLE OF THE APOSTLE’S CREED

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity,  
and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won  
me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with  
gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent  
suffering and death.

All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom,  
and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,  
just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.  
This is most certainly true.

**HYMN OF THE DAY**

*“O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is”*  
**Hymn 342**

O Jesus Christ, your manger is  
My paradise at which I am reclining.  
For there, O Lord, we find the Word  
made flesh for us - your grace is brightly shining.

He whom the sea and wind obey  
Comes down to serve the sinner in great meekness.  
Now God’s own Son with us is one  
And joins us and our children in our weakness.

Dear Christian friends, on him depend;  
Be of good cheer and let no sorrow move you.  
For God’s own Child in mercy mild  
Joins you to him - how greatly God must love you!

Ponder again what glory then  
The Lord will give you for your earthly sadness.  
The angel host can never boast  
Of greater glory, greater bliss or gladness.

The world may hold her wealth and gold;  
But you, my heart, keep Christ as your true treasure.  
To him hold fast until at last  
A crown is yours and honor in full measure.

**SERMON**

Blest be the God of Israel Who comes to set us free  
 And raises up new hope for us: A Branch from David's tree.  
 So have the prophets long declared That with a mighty arm  
 God would turn back our enemies And all who wish us harm.

With promised mercy will God still The covenant recall,  
 The oath once sworn to Abraham: From foes to save us all,  
 That we might worship without fear And offer lives of praise,  
 In holiness and righteousness To serve God all our days.

My child, as prophet of the Lord, You will prepare his way,  
 To tell God's people they are saved From sin's eternal sway.  
 Then shall God's mercy from on high Shine forth and never cease  
 To drive away the gloom of death And lead us into peace.

## PRAYER

- M: May this be a time, O Lord, for confession and repentance. Forgive us for the apathy that harms our faith and hinders our works. Forgive us for boasting of our past achievements and for blaming others for our present problems. Rid us of indifference to public worship and Bible study. Destroy the distrust that plagues us, and shatter every thought and word that harms the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.
- C: **Create in us pure hearts, O God, and renew steadfast spirits within us.**
- M: Let this be a time, O Lord, when you renew us again by Word and sacrament, when you reform our hearts and minds, and when you restore to us the joy of fellowship and service. Grant to us in this age and in this place the courage, steadfastness, and dedication of those who have gone before us.
- C: **May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us.**

- M: Let this be a time, O Lord, when we recommit and reconsecrate ourselves to the ministry of the gospel. Let us find joy in our unity, zeal for our work, and success in our labor.
- C: **May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us, that his ways may be known on earth, his salvation among all nations. Amen.**

#### LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

#### BLESSING

- M: The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

#### CLOSING HYMN

*"Let Us All with Gladsome Voice"*

**Hymn 332**

Let us all with gladsome voice praise the God of heaven,  
who, to bid our hearts rejoice, his own Son has given.

To this vale of tears he comes, here to serve in sadness,  
that with him in heav'n's fair homes we may reign in gladness.

We are rich, for he was poor; is not this a wonder?  
Therefore praise God evermore here on earth and yonder.

Christ, our Lord and Savior dear, bless us and be near us.  
Grant us now a glad new year. Amen, Jesus, hear us.

## OFFERING

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**Join Us in Worship New Year's Eve!**  
New Year's Eve Service - 5 pm  
Followed by Game Night!