

Rejoice Greatly, For Your King Is Coming.

Text: Luke 1:67-80

1) Let us prepare to receive Him

Suggested Hymns:

2) Let us accept the blessings He brings

11, 9, 851, 10, 18

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 1:67-79, ⁶⁷ *Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:* ⁶⁸ *“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people,* ⁶⁹ *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David,* ⁷⁰ *As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began,* ⁷¹ *That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us,* ⁷² *To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant,* ⁷³ *The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:* ⁷⁴ *To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,* ⁷⁵ *In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.*

⁷⁶ *“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,* ⁷⁷ *To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,* ⁷⁸ *Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;* ⁷⁹ *To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Imagine a group of travellers during the night on a way beset with many dangers. Only by the dim light of the stars overhead they can find their way. Objects along the road appear indistinctly. A clump of trees or an overhanging rock stand out from the surrounding darkness. There is a timid rabbit, frightened from its burrow, scampering off to safety, or a bird overhead,

disturbed in its nightly sleep, fluttering through the branches. These objects you can see, but only dimly and vaguely because of the darkness of the night.

Now the travellers enter a dense forest. The darkness deepens. They see fiery eyes peering at them from the dark underbrush. They may be the eyes of a wolf or a hyena or even of a mountain lion. Their hearts quake as they hear the blood-curdling howl of a pack of wolves in a valley near by.

As the travellers continue on their way, they descend into the lowlands, where a dense fog intensifies the darkness. It becomes so dark that they cannot see their hands before their eyes. They sit down, close together, fearing to go on. They know that the dawn of the morning is close at hand. As the saying goes, *it is darkest just before dawn*.

Imagine the joy of this group of people when they see the first rays of daybreak over the distant hills, when they observe the first signs of the dayspring in the east. Now the darkness quickly disappears, the fogs of the night are lifting, and the wanderers of the night continue on their way rejoicing, basking in the warmth and light of the glorious sun that floods the world with gladness.

Here you have a picture of God's people of the Old Testament. God had given them the dim, yet true light of His prophecies concerning His coming salvation. Our text says, *As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets*. These prophecies were dim in the beginning. They were as stars compared with the sunlight of the New Testament.

There is Gen. 3:15, "*And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.*" Here God promises His people the Woman's Seed, the Saviour, who, being bruised in part Himself, will bruise the devil's head and overpower him. Psalm 22, pictures the Saviour with pierced hands and feet on the cross.

There is the wonderful 53d chapter of the prophet Isaiah, "*A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*"¹ The prophecies become more definite and distinct in the course of the centuries, during which God's people longed for the coming of the Messiah.

Even the place of Christ's birth was foretold Micah in 5:2. But immediately before the fulfilment of the time there was a long silence. For over four hundred years prophecy had ceased in Israel. The darkness deepened before the dawn. The enemies of God seemed to be increasing. Many of the faithful in Israel wondered, *Will the Messiah ever come? Will God ever make the promises He gave to our fathers come true?*

Imagine, then, the unspeakable joy of the faithful few who had longed for the coming of the Lord's salvation, when finally the Dayspring from on high visited them in the incarnation of Christ. Look at the devout and humble adoration of the shepherds from Bethlehem's field, and the indescribable joy of aged Simeon in the Temple at the sight of the Infant in his arms, ***"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation ³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, ³² A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."***²

Then look also at the Wise Men from the East who came to worship the young Christ-child.

This irrepressible joy of all the faithful people in Israel at the coming of the Messiah is also expressed in the Benedictus of Zacharias. It is a true Advent text. During this blessed season Christians are in a state of expectancy and preparation for the spiritual coming anew of our Lord into our hearts and lives — at the coming Christmas festival, and yes, throughout the whole church-year.

In the spirit of this song of praise of Zacharias let us *Rejoice Greatly, for your King is coming*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Let Us Prepare To Receive Him

Our text is taken from the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. While Zacharias was performing the duties of the priest's office and was burning incense in the Temple at Jerusalem, there appeared to him an angel of the Lord foretelling that Elizabeth would bear a child whose name they should call John.

Because Zacharias in his unbelief demanded a sign, the angel gave him a sign and a penalty, in that he was to be unable to speak until the child would be born. Eight days after the child's birth he was filled with the Holy Spirit and

prophesied, pronouncing the wonderful song of praise in our text called the *Benedictus*.

The song of jubilee of this ancient priest is like a mighty river gushing forth its waters with irresistible force, rising higher and higher until it overflows its banks, watering all the meadows around it.

The cause for the great joy of Zacharias is the immediate birth of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, at Bethlehem. Through the message of the angel retold by the Virgin Mary (who had been in the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth for three months) and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Zacharias knew that now the time was fulfilled of which all prophets of old had spoken and written, that the salvation of Israel was drawing near in the birth of the Messiah.

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! ... your King is coming to you*³ is the substance of his song, and the theme of his prophecy. Let us rejoice greatly, for your King is coming to you. *Are we not now looking forward with expectancy to the happy celebration of Christmas, when we commemorate our Saviour's incarnation, His coming in the flesh? Yes, are we not now, with this blessed Advent season, beginning a new season of grace in which Christ comes anew into our hearts and homes with His Word and Sacraments?*

The Hymnist writes,⁴

Hark the glad sound! the Saviour comes,
The Saviour promised long.
Let every heart prepare a throne,
And every voice a song.

If the Queen would write you a letter telling you of her coming into your home, you would say: *"Oh, what a great honour is being bestowed upon me! What careful preparations I need to make to be a worthy host of such an honoured guest!"* You would not forget her visit as long as you live.

Now, here is One who is greater than the Queen. Here is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and He offers to come to you anew. In Christ the Lord God of Israel *"has visited and redeemed His people."* *"God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."*⁵ Christ is God, very God of very God. This great Lord, your God, desires to make you His dwelling-place. *Will you receive*

Him into your hearts and homes? If so, how are you to meet Him? Our text tells us this important information.

Beginning with ***“And you, child,”*** Zacharias dramatically addresses his own new-born son, saying that John ***will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,*** ⁷⁷ ***To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,*** ⁷⁸ ***Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us.***

Here Zacharias brings out the future greatness of his son. John was to be not only a prophet of the Lord in the ordinary sense of the word, a preacher of the Gospel of Christ, but he was to be especially the precursor, the forerunner, of Jesus.

John was to be the herald of Jesus. In certain respects John was to be greater than all the prophets that had preceded him. They had pointed to Christ from a distance, but John the Baptist could point directly to Jesus and exclaim, ***“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”***⁶ John was to go immediately before Christ and prepare the way for the coming into the hearts of the people, not only of his day, but for all times.

If you therefore ask, ***“O how shall I receive Thee, How greet Thee, Lord, aright?”***⁷ then learn from John. The substance of his message is first, repent of your sins, and make straight the way of the Lord.

As the prophet Isaiah wrote, ³ ***The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth.”***⁸

When an ancient king announced his coming, the authorities of the city would order all highways over which the king would travel to be repaired. All ruts and holes in the road were filled up, and the high spots were levelled down, so that the king might ride smoothly over the prepared highway into the city.

Thus John the Baptist was to break down the obstacles on the way for Jesus into the hearts of the sinners. By the preaching of the Law, John broke down the

ignorance, the arrogance, the self-reliance, and the self-righteousness of the sinner and brought him to a realisation of his need for a Saviour.

Secondly, John's message brought the sweet assurance of the Gospel, as our text says, *For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, ⁷⁷ To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, ⁷⁸ Through the tender mercy of our God.*

Luther says, *“John is to come and give the people of God a knowledge which is not to be a knowledge of sin, of wrath, of death, but a knowledge of salvation, that is, such preaching from which one learns how to be saved and delivered from death and sin. That is an art of which the world knows not one word.”⁹*

If Jesus is to come anew into our hearts and lives, and we are to receive Him as our King, then His way must be prepared as John prepared it, by repentance and faith. Then Law and Gospel must be preached in the proper proportion, not only to bring us to a knowledge of our sin, but also to a deep appreciation of our Saviour.

Let us, then, rejoice greatly in this blessed Advent season and praise God at the coming of our King. Let us throw open wide the gates of our hearts that the King of Glory may enter in. Let us humble ourselves in the sight of Almighty God, repent of our sins, and humbly trust in the Lord's mercy through faith in our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Is anyone especially burdened with cares and griefs and sorrows? Does anybody look to the future with anxiety, trembling for their soul's salvation as they think of the many temptations of Satan and the world with which they will be beset in the new church-year?

Then remember, that Jesus, your King and Redeemer, will comfort and cheer you when you are in trouble, when you are depressed in spirit, when you are burdened with special cares, or when you are weeping over heart-breaking bereavements.

The mercy of God will make the Dayspring from on high visit you especially at such time with the rich comfort of His Word. And you shall see anew the tender mercy of God. Then your life will again be bright with these visits of your Lord, as the sky is brightened with the coming sun. Rejoice, then, greatly at the coming of your King.

The Hymnist writes,¹⁰

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

Let us now consider what wonderful blessings Jesus brings to you in His coming.

2. Let Us Accept The Blessings He Brings.

Imagine that our Saviour would come into our midst today and hand to each of us a cheque written for a million dollars. Oh, you say, that would be wonderful! How happy He would make us by it, and how joyfully we would thank Him for it!

Yet, my friends, our King, who comes to us in Word and Sacrament, brings a gift that far transcends in value all the silver and gold of this world. Silver and gold could make your heart glad but for a moment. Soon you might lose it; at best, you could possess it only for a few years. But what Christ offers to us in Word and Sacrament far transcends the value of all earthly treasures.

Zacharias rejoices, *He has visited and redeemed His people. [He] has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David,*⁷¹ *That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us.*

Salvation from all our enemies, that is the great gift Christ brings. Note firstly that our salvation is a rescue from our enemies. By the visit of the Dayspring from on high, by Christ's glorious work of redemption, we have been *saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us*. Our enemies are sin, Satan, hell, and death.

Christ redeemed us from sin. In Christ *we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*¹¹ *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.*¹² As the angel announced to Joseph in Matthew 1:21 Jesus *will save His people from their sins.*

Since sin has been paid for by Christ, Satan has lost his claim on man. Satan has lost his power and dominion over man. *For this purpose the Son of God was*

manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Our Champion, the Seed of the Woman, has come and has bruised the head of the serpent.¹³ Now also the very gates of hell shall not prevail against us.

Since hell itself, eternal death, has no longer any power over us, then we also need no longer fear temporal death. Scripture says that *Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.*¹⁴

This salvation is also a plentiful salvation. Zacharias sings, ⁶⁹ *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David.* You may have seen a picture of a cornucopia, the horn of plenty, filled with grain and fruit to overflowing. When some congregations celebrate the harvest thanksgiving festival they decorate their church with the products of the field and lay before the altar a large horn, which is filled with fruit and grain.

So is the salvation of our God a plentiful salvation. It is all-sufficient to save all people, of all times, from all sin. Where sin abounds, there grace much more abounds. Scripture says, *“Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”*¹⁵

Note next that the salvation of our God is also a powerful salvation. It is a *“horn of salvation.”* The strength of the beast is in his horn. That is the great offensive and defensive weapon that our King brings with Him to pull down our enemies and protect us against them. *Oh, rejoice, then, greatly, for your King is coming to you!*

Consider next that this great and wonderful salvation of God in Christ comes to us without any merit or worthiness in us, solely by the grace of God. Zacharias sings in his song of praise, *To perform the mercy promised to our fathers and To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,*⁷⁸ *Through the tender mercy of our God.*

The very example of Zacharias is a proof of God’s wonderful grace and mercy. Zacharias had been guilty of unbelief. He deserved God’s wrath and punishment. But now, at the birth of John, God takes all punishment from him, and yes, He even pours out on him a rich measure of His Holy Spirit, so that Zacharias is permitted to prophesy and sing the praises of God.

Marvel at the wonderful grace of God, that, while we were yet in our sins, God came to us in the flesh to be our Brother and our Deliverer. ⁷⁷ *To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins.* Oh, the great love of God that He should visit us when we were yet in our sins!

Let it never be forgotten that, *when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*¹⁶ And *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*¹⁷

Just consider the great mercy of our God that He lowers Himself to visit undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinners. His saving visit springs from grace, pure grace, altogether unmixed with any merit or claim on our part.

Our text reveals even more to us. Zacharias describes lost and condemned mankind as sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. Despair was besetting men; they did not know how to find their way out of the darkness and surrounding death. Inactive, resigned to their fate, in the very depths of despair, without being able even to raise a finger toward their deliverance, — that is the natural condition of man.

Rejoice, then, over such wonderful grace of God, that, while we would not, and yes, could not do anything to save ourselves, God visits us from on high in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. O wonder of all wonders! *Should our hearts, then, not be filled with joy and thanksgiving during this blessed Advent season? Should we not shout for joy when we consider our dreadful former state and of our present wonderful deliverance?*

We were formerly held in bondage, sitting in the shadow of death, but now we have been delivered from sin, death, and hell when we despaired of all help. While we sat helpless and hopeless, there came our great Deliverer and Saviour, the Dayspring from on high, to save us from our enemies. Oh, *“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people.*

*What shall we now do? Having heard that our King comes to us with such wonderful gifts, the question comes to us, How may we show our appreciation and gratitude? The answer is by serving Him that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,*⁷⁵ *In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. To guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Note, then, that this great salvation, prepared for us by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is to lead us to serve Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:15 ¹⁵ that *[Jesus] died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*

When you see the tender mercy of God whereby the Dayspring from on high has visited us, when you contemplate the great sacrifice that Christ, the Son of God, has brought for our sins on Calvary's cross, you are put face to face with the question, *What can I now do for Him?*

Let us, then, serve Jesus in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives, rejoicing that our King comes to us with such a great salvation.

Let us conclude with the words of the Hymnist,¹⁸

Lord, how shall I thank Thee rightly?
I acknowledge that by Thee
I am saved eternally.
Let me not forget it lightly,
But to Thee at all times cleave,
And my heart true peace receive:

*Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness!
Christ has done away with sadness.
Hence, all sorrow and repining,
For the sun of grace is shining. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Isaiah 53:3

² Luke 2:29-32

³ Zechariah 9:9

⁴ Hymn 9

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:19

⁶ John 1:29

⁷ Hymn 10

⁸ Isaiah 40:3-4

⁹ Vol. XIII B, 2707

¹⁰ Hymn 9

¹¹ Ephesians 1:7

¹² Galatians 3:13

¹³ Gen. 3:15

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 1:10, See also Hebrews 2:14-15

¹⁵ Isaiah 1:18

¹⁶ Romans 5:6

¹⁷ Romans 5:8

¹⁸ Hymn 32