

Luke 1:68-75 *"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—⁷²to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

God's Eulogy

1. Praise God because he visited us with redemption
2. Praise God because he fulfilled Scripture
3. Praise God because he kept his covenant promise

You know what a eulogy is, right? A eulogy is said at funerals. It's when someone gets up and talks about how great the deceased was, even though everybody in the building knows his shortcomings and faults. Eulogies are discouraged at funerals in our church because we want to focus on Jesus and what he has done to save us. Our comfort at the time of death is not how well grandma baked Christmas cookies or how much grandpa liked to fish. Our comfort is the sacrifice of Christ for our sins and the promise of life in his resurrection.

Today, Zechariah gives us God's eulogy. Now, I'm not saying that God is dead, as Frederick Nietzsche asserted. No, God's not dead. There's a whole movie to prove that. But Zechariah is giving us God's eulogy. You see, eulogy is a Greek word meaning to speak well or praise. It is the first word of Zechariah's song of praise in our gospel lesson today. Zechariah is giving us God's eulogy.

Zechariah was dumb. No, not in that way. He couldn't speak because he refused to believe what the angel, Gabriel, announced to him. Gabriel told Zechariah that he and his aged wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, John, who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Since Zechariah wouldn't believe it, he was struck dumb until John was born and circumcised. Now with his son, John, in the cradle and with God's Son, Jesus, in the womb of the virgin Mary, Zechariah's tongue was unloosed. And the first words from his mouth? A eulogy!

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them." The Lord our God comes to us. This is not some stunt double or understudy. This is God himself. He comes to do the unexpected. What should the sinner expect from a holy and just God? You would expect for him to want to keep his distance. Why would he want to be part of this sinful world? A world that often robs him of his glory, that fails to acknowledge him as creator, that complains about not having enough and then complains about not having enough space to put their stuff. You might expect God to dust off his hands and keep his distance. But, instead, God does the unexpected. He shows us mercy. He comes to us as a tiny baby lying in a manger. He comes into our world to redeem us.

A little child plays innocently in a park. Suddenly, a man grabs her from behind and drags her into a van. She's gagged. A bag is pulled over her head. Dust stings her eyes. The smell of sweat and cigarette smoke twitches her nose. The tightening ropes cut into her wrist. Fear overwhelms her. What will happen to her? But the next morning, when the van doors open, her tears turn to joy. There stand mom and dad, ready to take her home. She's free! Why? Because the ransom had been paid. (Gregg Bitter) Jesus is God in human flesh paying the ransom. God has redeemed us.

It must be a terrible experience, being in the hands of one's enemies. You can read about the horror that Louis Zamperini went through as a prisoner of war in the book, "Unbroken." But Zechariah sees in the birth of his son, the beginning of the fulfilling of the promise of that One who would bring us salvation from our enemies, Jesus, son of Mary.

Our God has come into our world to redeem us, to bring us freedom from our enemies. What held you captive? The sin that your inborn nature wants to re-kidnap you and steal you away from your true Father in heaven. But you have already been redeemed, bought at a price. Why sell yourself into slavery to sin again? Satan's icy fingers long to pull you back into his thrall of death and hell. But Jesus is mightier than Satan. Praise to the Lord, our God! For he has worked *salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.*

Here is where faith begins. Faith rightly understands the terror of sin, the tyranny of the devil, the torture of hell. It looks at death and sees the wages of sin, what our sin has rightly earned us. It sees our hopelessness, our helplessness, our wretchedness. But then it rejoices in our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the horn of our salvation, our Redeemer. Just as God promised.

“But, you promised!” What sad words! Promises made. Promises broken. Parents promise to take their children to a ball game or a theme park. Then something else comes up, and they can’t do it. Next time when the parents give a promise, the children are not so likely to believe them. On their wedding day, husbands and wives promise to be faithful to each other for the rest of their lives. All too soon one files for divorce. Politicians promise that if they are elected, they will solve all of our social or economic problems. Once elected they do nothing, or they seem to make things worse. A used car dealer says a car is in perfect shape. Six months later the buyer is spending hundreds of dollars on repairs. Promises made. Promises broken. After a while we have difficulty trusting anyone.

Our whole relationship with God is based on a promise. It is a promise that was first given in the garden of Eden and repeated over the centuries. The Old Testament is really the history of how God preserved and expanded the promise. He repeated it to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He promised it to be David’s son and he expanded on it through from Isaiah through Malachi.

What God promised, he delivered. In a manger in a stable, in a forgotten little village to a virgin mother God delivered his promise. That’s another reason to eulogize God. He fulfilled all that the prophets had foretold. *As he said through his holy prophets of long ago.* Jesus is Abraham’s promised Seed, Moses’ great Prophet, great David’s greater Son, Isaiah’s Immanuel, Ezekiel’s Shepherd, Zechariah’s Branch and Malachi’s Sun of righteousness. Every prophecy about Christ in the Old Testament was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

God’s Word is true and God keeps his promises. When you have cancer spreading in your body or you spend lonely nights by yourself, when you worry about the future for your children or wonder how you are going to make ends meet, when you go away to college or lose your job, we need to know that God keeps his promises. The birth of John the Baptist, just as the angel said, tells us that God keeps his promises. The birth of Jesus who fulfilled all that God promised about him, tells us that God keeps his promises. So we can be certain that he will do what he promised he would do.

So, praise God because he keeps his promise. He keeps his covenant. *The oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.* God made a covenant with Abraham to give him the land of Canaan, a large number of descendants and the one descendant who would be a blessing to all people, the Savior. With the birth of his son as the forerunner, Zechariah could see that covenant finally fulfilled in the child of Mary.

God made a covenant with you, too. At your baptism he made an oath that in Jesus your sins are truly washed away. He renews his covenant with you each time you eat and drink the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. God kept his covenant oath to Abraham. He keeps his covenant oath to you, too.

Let us then live our lives in the promise of that covenant because he has enabled us *to serve him without fear ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.* Picture standing in a long line in the store, where everyone must take their number and be served in order. That’s life. You are only waiting for your number to be called when you will be swallowed by the great abyss of death. But with the promise of Jesus, life isn’t just waiting to die. Jesus was born to bring it and John the Baptist announced it: salvation, the forgiveness of sins. Believe that message. Believe that there is more to life than waiting to die.

Oh sure, we still face the consequences of living in a sinful world. Our cars still break down. Sometimes we still become discouraged. We experience disagreements and frustration. We may be enduring pain in our bodies or our hearts right now. But God has fulfilled his covenant. We can serve Jesus in our living and our giving, at church and at home and at work, in all that we do out of faith to the glory of God.

Zechariah’s joy was that God made a promise to crush Satan’s head and he fulfilled that promise in Jesus Christ. May our Christmas celebration be a song of praise to God. May it be God’s eulogy.