**The Last Prophet: John**

**Prophet In The Womb Pointing To Christ**

**Luke 1:5-45**

Advent 1 Mid-week – 11.30.2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When we think of prophets, we think of those guys and their books in the Old Testament. We think of those who foretold doom and gloom to Israel if they would not repent of the idolatry, their following the gods of their neighbors. When we think of the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Malachi come to mind – along with some others.

But there was more than terror in their words. What they truly did was turn the people of God back to Him in repentance for the forgiveness of sins. They pointed the people to the One who was to come, to free them from their slavery to sin, and win the victory over death and Satan for them. Prophets were those men of God who pointed forward to the coming of God’s Christ.

In that context, John was the last prophet pointing to God’s Christ who was to come as Redeemer – He who would ‘buy back’ His people from sin, death, and the devil.

This Advent, John will be the one to point us to the Coming One Who has come, Who comes still, and Who will come again. John will help us prepare to meet Him who comes to us as our Savior-Redeemer, God’s Christ.

This evening we begin in Luke’s Gospel where we find John’s father, the priest Zechariah serving his duty in the temple of the Lord to burn incense. He did this when the “whole multitude of the people” were praying outside at the hour of incense, about 9:00am. Incense was a type of symbol of the prayers arising to the throne of God’s grace, having God’s command and blessing.

Our text declares that an angel of the Lord appeared to him at this time, and that Zechariah was “troubled” when he saw him, troubled further explained “and fear fell upon him.” An angel brings him to fear? Why? Wasn’t he “righteous?” Wasn’t he “walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord?”

You know exactly what that means, for you say the same things about people all the time. In regard to their outward actions, as far as what those in the world could see, they were ***righteous***. Many today would claim that they live a “fine Christian life.”

They walked blamelessly in the commandment and statutes of the Lord. They prayed at the proper times, went to the temple when they were supposed to be there, made the requisite sacrifices in the manner prescribed, and tithed as required. They were good Jews!

So, why is Zechariah afraid when Gabriel appears to him? Zechariah is filled with fear because he knows his sinfulness. He knows what he has done in violation of God’s Law – and he knows what sinfulness and evil lurks in his heart – all which nobody else knows. But he is before God’s messenger, one who stands in the presence of God.

Gabiel, knowing Zechariah’s fear, and having been sent by God to make a glorious announcement, alleviates that fear by saying, *“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”*

Of course, Zechariah’s sinfulness is further exposed when he questions Gabiel, citing Elizabeth’s age and his own as reasons that they could not have a child. At Zechariah’s doubting of God’s Word from the lips of the angel, the angel makes John unable to speak until the child’s birth.

In the angel’s words to Zechariah though, there is a specific prophecy, did you hear it? There is a prophecy which speaks to the sanctity of life in the womb. There is a prophecy that speaks of the ability of small children, infants, even those in the womb to have faith. Did you hear it? The angel declared of John, “*He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.”*

What is more, this angel is speaking about the One whom Mary will carry in her womb and declaring incredible things about Him. He declares that John *will be great* ***before the Lord****.* He *will turn many of the children of Israel* ***to the Lord their God***. A*nd he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready* ***for the Lord*** *a people prepared.”*

The Lord is none other than the name that is used of God. To say ‘Lord’ is to say ‘God.’ John was going to be filled and guided by the Spirit to point to God coming to His people. John was going to prophecy to the coming of God’s Christ, He who would save His people – as nothing less than God Himself – as God in human flesh.

Dearly beloved of God, this is what John does even in his mother’s womb. *In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”*

Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, she is granted a voice to proclaim what the child in her womb is proclaiming. John, as God’s prophet leaps for joy in Elizabeth’s womb. John proclaims that the one carried in Mary’s womb is none other than the Lord – He is none other than God in human flesh.

Fleet Farm has had their Toyland display up since the day after Halloween – or close. Many put their Christmas trees up the day after Thanksgiving – they couldn’t even wait until the beginning of Advent. “It needs to get done now! We need to be ready when it arrives!” But what are people anticipating? Even good Christians? Is it the birth of their Savior-God or something else.

I wonder if you paid attention to the collect for this first week in Advent? *Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end.*

We want God’s power! We want God’s protection! We want to be rescued from the threatening peril our sins! We want to be saved by God’s mighty deliverance!

Do you see it?

Do you see God’s protection? John pointed to it – He leaped in the womb with joy for the protection of God en-fleshed in Mary’s womb.

Do you see God’s rescue from the threatening peril of your sins? John pointed to it – He leaped in the womb with joy for your rescue, He who delivers you from the threatening perils of your sin, the One en-fleshed in Mary’s womb.

Do you want to see God’s mighty deliverance? John pointed to it – He leaped in the womb with joy for the God’s mighty deliverance, enfleshed in Mary’s womb.

A child – ***A CHILD IN THE WOMB*** – has been granted the faith to be prophet of the most High God and point to God’s Christ.

So, what consumes your Advent preparations?

Obtaining or thinking of the gifts that will be nestled under the tree?

Getting all the lights and the ornaments in the right place?

It is all about donations of time or volunteering, your willingness to sacrifice for the sake of your neighbors?

Will your joy be found in the gathering with family – after all, we are told that it is all about family. In fact, there are some churches who will have Christmas Eve service, but dumping Christmas Day services because that day is all about family.

I pray you heed the prophecy of John and repent of sinfulness. Repent of looking at the approach Christmas with worldly eyes and oftentimes missing out on the coming of our Lord and Savior.

Let the prophet speak to you boldly.

Even as God hid Himself in Mary’s womb, John recognized Him as Savior – even from his mother’s womb.

Your Savior comes to you – Hidden in the womb of His bride the Church.

Your Savior comes to you – Hidden in the Word you hear.

Your Savior comes to you – Hidden in the bread you eat.

Your Savior comes to you – Hidden in the cup you drink.

Leap for joy at the coming of the Lord.

Rejoice in God our Savior.

Come into His presence with Thanksgiving and rejoice in the salvation He brings.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.