

Nativity of St. John the Baptist

June 23, 2024

Luke 1:67-80

The passage selected for the sermon this morning comes from the Gospel according St. Luke in the first chapter.

BLESSED be the Lord God of Israel; * for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Amen.

If there is a prayer book in the pew, open it up to page 14. There you see a Latin word, *Benedictus*, which is shortened from *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*. Which means...Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. Like the other songs, or *Canticles* found in Morning and Evening Prayer, the Benedictus begins with a blessing of some kind for God's loving kindness. (Look at the Te Deum, et. al.)

Today piggybacks on Fr. Mike's message last week about fathers and the obedience of Zecharias in the naming of his son and the loosing of his tongue to speak. When God loosened his tongue,

Zacharias had learned his lesson. Not only that, but he was a new man who truly believed with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Even Though Zacharias was a priest and knew the scriptures inside and out, He hadn't believed with his whole heart. But now he did. Can you imagine someone you know not being able to speak for nine months suddenly gained the ability to speak once again?

In the gospel reading, that after Zacharias had regained his speech he spoke and praised God. The next verse says, "and fear came on all that dwelt round about them, and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the Hill Country of Judaea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts saying what manner of child shall this be!"

Those that saw the miracle seemed to have burning desire truly understand what happened and realized that they had witnessed something supernatural. And they truly had.

There the three lessons I want to share with you.

The first lesson is that Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit to share his prophetic canticle. He was qualified for this because his unbelief and distrust in God had been forgiven. How often do we doubt the word of God or Not believe God's promises? We all

have times of doubt, (after all, it is in our nature). And I think that it is OK to be sometimes doubtful as long as we trust in the Lord's promises with the statement, "I believe you Lord, help my unbelief."

The second thing to learn from this reading, is that there are three different phrases in this canticle and have three different audiences and meanings. I'd like to look at each of them and break them down a little bit.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people;

And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us, in the House of his servant David;

As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began;

That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us.

This is the first sentence in this canticle, and it is addressed to God. It is Zacharias' thanksgiving to our heavenly father for providing Redemption for his people. That redemption came in the form of our Lord Jesus Christ. It also proclaimed to the

People That Jesus was from the House of David which established his royal lineage.

The middle verse in this canticle is addressed to the people. He reminded them of the prophecies promised from their forefathers to be delivered from their enemies. The day was soon to come where the Messiah would save them, although they didn't realize that the salvation was from their sins not from their political oppressors.

The last sentence of the canticle was addressed to his son John. And thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways. There we see the Commission of John the Baptist to become the forerunner of Jesus Christ and to prepare the way for Jesus. That is why he is called John the Baptist, his teaching of the Messiah included baptism for the remission of sins.

The very last phrase of the canticle says, "to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. This is a call to holiness for all of us. God longs for us to be holy all the days of our lives not just on Sunday. We must radiate all manner of decency, of kindness, of holiness, to all that come across us. I will interject here that the members of this parish do this on a regular basis and for

that, not only are we grateful, not only do you demonstrate your desire to be holy, but you also honor your Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

The third lesson is that God prepares his prophets and teachers for their work. The last verse in today's gospel says, "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, in the deserts till the time of his showing unto Israel." Who else do we know who went out into the desert to prepare for their ministry? Jesus did.

For his time in the desert, John had to grow in the capacities of his mind so that he had a strong judgment and strong resolution. Those who are strong in the Lord are strong in the spirit.

John didn't spend time in schools or in the synagogues. No, he spent time in contemplation and devotion until the time of his arriving in Israel. In his contemplation he learned of the the will of God before his ministry. Through his prayers and devotion he grew nearer to God and filled with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it's not a bad thing to be in in a desert. Not necessarily like the Sahara, but a retreat from all that is around us in the world and in our communities. A special time of prayer and devotion for understanding the will of God and praising his holy name. A spiritual retreat is a blessed experience.

So, what did we learn today? Well number one, is that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The second lesson is that when we pray, we first need to bless the Lord for his goodness and loving kindness, remember his promises, and to be holy all the days of our life. The final thing is that God will prepare us for his good work and strengthen us in mind body and spirit.

So why don't we finish by saying the canticle of Zacharias called the *Benedictus* together.

BLESSED be the Lord God of Israel; * for he hath visited and redeemed his people;

And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us, * in the house of his servant David;

As he spake by the mouth of his holy Prophets, * which have been since the world began;

That we should be saved from our enemies, * and from the hand of all that hate us.

To perform the mercy promised to our forefathers, * and to remember his holy covenant;

To perform the oath which he sware to our forefather Abraham, * that he would give us;

That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies * might

serve him without fear;

In holiness and righteousness before him, * all the days of our life.

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: * for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

To give knowledge of salvation unto his people * for the remission of their sins,

Through the tender mercy of our God; * whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us;

To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, * and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory be to the father and to the son and to the Holy Ghost*

As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen.