**JESUS, THE RISING SUN**

Luke 1:57-80

1:78,79 “…**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**.”

I thank God for his abundant blessing on our Christmas worship service last week. God blessed us with a wonderful word of Immanuel, God-With-Us, which is the reason for the joy to the world.

Our Christmas day comes right after the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. It’s a dark time of the year; some daylight, but less of it. It is a season of sheltering, a season of anticipation; it is a time of waiting and wondering what comes next. Today’s passage is Zechariah’s song. It’s a joyous song for sad people; it’s not “the blues”, a sad song for sad people, but a joyful and triumphant invitation to people living in darkness to embrace the light of Jesus. May God bless you to appreciate the blessing of Christmas through Zechariah’s song!

**1. His name is John**

Zechariah and Elisabeth were childless, which made Zechariah very fatalistic. Nevertheless, he kept a life of faith to the end before God. Then God blessed his family abundantly. Nine months earlier, the angel Gabriel had announced that Elizabeth would bear a son, and that nothing would be impossible with God. And now, that promise was fulfilled. Elisabeth gave birth to a son, as the angel of the Lord said. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy, and they shared her joy (58). The custom was to give the baby a name at the time of circumcision. Their relatives were sure to name the baby after his daddy Zechariah: “Zechariah Jr.” But his mother, Elisabeth, spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” They all wondered and said, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name” (61). Then, they turned to Zechariah, who had been mute for the past nine month ever since he doubted the message of the Lord’s angel. But Zechariah had no doubts this time. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John” (63). Their relatives and neighbors were surprised by his answer. It must not have been easy to follow God’s instruction to name his boy John. At that time, Jewish customs were the backbone of the Jewish people. Zechariah had to overcome peer pressure and had to become an object of criticism. How could Zechariah obey the angel’s instruction in such detail? It was because he had a learning attitude toward God’s word, even though he was a man of lifelong faith. Often we are tempted, on the basis of past experience, to put our spiritual life on cruise control and rest on a tradition of activity. However, Zechariah received God’s training of 9 months-silence with a humble attitude. Can you imagine not speaking for that length of time?

When Zechariah obeyed God’s word, his tongue was loosed and he began to speak, praising God. Then, the neighbors were filled with fear, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things (65). Zechariah sang as a person whose tongue was formerly mute. These were his first words after 9 months of silence.

During the last silence training period, he grew and become the Holy Spirit’s instrument. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah sung his heart out. His song describes who Jesus is and proclaims the meaning of Christmas.

**2. Jesus, the Horn of Salvation**

At that time, Israel was under foreign control. They were groaning under the oppression of the Roman yoke. People despaired without any hope. In addition, they had not heard any word of God through prophets for a long time. Is God still with us? Is God still for us? Has God forgotten us and abandoned us? Is God’s holy covenant nullified? All these questions come from those who were suffering for a long time.

Look at 68. “**Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people**.” “He has come” means “He has visited”; this is a central word in the biblical testimony. It is about God’s coming and his caring for us. God was concerned about his people and visited them in the Exodus (Ex3; 4). God identified with suffering Israel and redeemed them. After his redeeming work, God also gave them a mission to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Yet, his people failed to keep the covenant again and again. They disobeyed his words, and abandoned God. So God did not have to visit these rebellious people. But in his great mercy, God took initiative and visited them first. He remembered his holy covenant (69; 72-73). In order to visit his people, Almighty God came to this world as a helpless baby in a manger. He identified with the lowly and suffering people. People often ask: where is God when I am suffering? The Christmas message testifies that God has come to you; God is there where you are suffering.

Look at verse 69. “**He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David**.” A horn here is not a brass horn. It’s a bull’s horn symbolizing power and strength (2Sam22:3). The horn of salvation is the emblem of the power of God Almighty for salvation. There are a number of references in the OT to the horns of the wild ox (Dt33:17…). What the people of Israel needed was salvation from their enemies. They had suffered as a slave people for 400 under the yoke of Egypt. The ungodly merciless people were the bitter enemy of the people of Israel. After the Exodus, they lived in the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. But they were under the constant threats and fear of their enemies even in the Promised Land. God gave them David as their shepherd and king. David overcame all their enemies. While King David ruled, his people enjoyed peace. But it ended too soon. In the past, the enemies of Israel were neighboring countries who had harassed them. Now they were living under Roman yoke.

But the real enemy of Israel was not the neighboring countries, but it was the sins in their hearts. We live in a land of freedom. Who is your enemy? Look into mirror and ask yourself. Many people think they suffer because of their difficult circumstances. But actually people suffer because of the power of sin and death. Sin is most deceptive and destructive. Satan takes control over sinners through their sins. The horn of Satan is the power of sin. When it impales a man, it leaves him in a critical condition throughout his lifetime. In Romans 1, we see many kinds of ugly people: the wicked, the evil, murderers, inventors of evil doing, and senseless, heartless, ruthless people. These are pictures of people who are under the power of sin and death.

People want to take control over others. We cannot humble ourselves because we are proud. But praise God, for he has raised up a horn of salvation to crush the power of sin and death. In order to save us, the Almighty God humbled himself, lowering himself to the position of a servant (Phil2). Jesus laid down his life even to a helpless death on a cross. In this way Jesus destroyed the power of sin by his death. And He destroyed the power of death by His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus is the reason for Christmas. This horn of salvation is incredible strength to deliver us from sin and death; it is incredible power to save us from depression and anxiety. Jesus is strong and able to save us from broken relationships. The child born is so powerful to destroy the devil’s work. He is the horn of salvation. The battle is not ours; the battle is the Lord’s; he is the strength for our salvation. He destroyed the devil’s work. He defeats our enemies; he is fighting for our destiny. Do you have no strength? He is your strength. This is the reason why God sent Jesus: to fight for you! When you have come to the end of your resources, he is the resource; when you messed up everything, he can come and give a new beginning. Are you in the middle of tests, he can come and turn it into testimony to his victory! This is the reason for Christmas!

Look at verses 74, 75 “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.” Everyone has a deep desire to be holy, as God is holy. When we do something for our holy God’s sake, we are happy indeed. On the other hand, those who do evil, intentionally or unintentionally, experience unutterable misery and tragedy in their souls. “Do whatever pleases your feeling” is the devil’s appeal to our sinful desire. But human beings are truly happy only when we live according to God’s will. God made us to be happy when we serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness. Through Jesus, we are made righteous, and our hearts are changed, so we serve God not out of duty, but out of joy and love. There is a story about a nurse. One day, a hospital visitor in India saw a nurse tending to the sores of a patient with leprosy. He said, “I’d never do that for a million dollars!” The nurse answered, “Neither would I. But I do it for Jesus … free of charge.”

**3. Jesus, the Rising Sun**

In verse 76, Zechariah sings that his son would be used as the forerunner of the Messiah. “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…”

After making a brief mention of his son, Zechariah lifts up Christ as the rising sun, the dawn from on high. Look at verses 78 and 79: “**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.**”

 “The rising sun” here can also be rendered as “the dawn from on high” – what a beautiful and fitting title for the Messiah, Jesus! Have you watched the rising of the sun – the coming of the dawn? This imagery is familiar to us. It speaks of a new day and a fresh start. It speaks of hope. When the sun appears, darkness disappears. The rising sun dispels darkness and expels elements of darkness. Jesus is God’s sunrise breaking in on those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Where is this sunrise from? It is from “the tender mercy of our God.” Not cold and naked mercy; but mercy flowing forth out of the heart of divine compassion. From his tender mercy, God sent his one and only Son as the light of the world.

Jesus came to this dark world as the rising sun. Jesus says in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” The visit of God is like the rising sun, because it ends our darkness. It banishes the night. Jesus drives out the shadow of death from our hearts. In his tender mercy, Jesus can heal all our wounded, broken hearts (Mal4:2). Jesus enlightens us to see God and his glorious kingdom, for he is the rising sun.

For many, there is no love and peace, because they are living in the darkness of their sins and in the shadow of death. There is no love and peace for them because they are under the shadow of death. When you watch the movie “Crossing,” which is about North-Korean defectors, your heart will break because it is a reality we are living in. Many are unutterably suffering under the shadow of death. But I believe that Jesus is mighty to expel the shadow of death there by the gospel! Jesus shines upon us to heal us, save us, and make us joyful.

Zechariah in the Spirit’s eye saw the coming of the Dawn. Jesus is life, and without Him is death. What is the darkness that you sit in? Turn to him today and live. No matter how dark the time of year, no matter how heavy your burden or deep your loss, He is born this day to you. The rising sun is shining into our darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. “Our night is ended once for all when we look at God visiting us in Jesus Christ. Our day may cloud over, but night will never return (Ch. Spurgeon).

How has 2010 been to you? Do you have expectation from the Lord for the coming year? When you appreciate the blessing of Christmas, you can have a great expectation and hope for your life next year. We don’t need sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Isaiah encourages us to claim this blessing of Christmas, saying, “**Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you**” (Isa60:1). We have a chance to respond to Jesus and embrace his light.

And all this flows out of the tender mercy of our God in Jesus Christ. Zechariah’s song arises from a heart set free. It declares that the long night has ended. This is your invitation to end the muteness of your soul, and join his song. It is an invitation to have the light switched on in your life. May the Rising Sun, Jesus, shine on the college students in St. Louis and into every corner of your life!