

Introduction: For over two thousand years people have been inventing ways to do evil (Romans 1:30). The law of entropy is relentless: when left without help, everything gets more and more chaotic. People paying attention to all that is happening in the world struggle to overcome feelings of despair and hopelessness. *** So, where is hope? In this: God sent His Son to this earth as a baby boy some two thousand years ago. He came as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) to bring joy to all who receive Him by faith as God's gift to humanity struggling with the chaos resulting from evil. Why did God do this? He did this because of His amazing LOVE for humanity. It is His desire that everyone receive His life-giving, life-changing LOVE. *** In His LOVE, God shows mercy to all who humble themselves before Him. Mercy is when people do not receive the punishment they deserve for failing to do what is right according to God, and instead doing the evil that their darkened hearts desire. *** On this last Sunday of Advent we look at God's LOVE through the prophecy given by Zechariah (remembered of Yah) on the day of his son Yokhanan's (Yah is gracious) circumcision. He describes the incarnation (taking on of a human body) of God's Son, then he speaks of redemption, salvation from enemies, and worship of God. All who do this have His Covenant Presence with them renewed and receive His mercy. *** Our Psalm reminds us that the highest God is looking down in order to lift up the poor and needy. Let's look closer at our passages for this fourth Sunday of Advent.

I. Zechariah praises God for coming to do mercy by delivering people from their enemies to worship Him; and, his son will be prophet to give knowledge of pardon of sins through God's tender mercy. (Luke 1:67-78)

A. Zechariah is inspired to bless the God of Israel for coming to redeem His people and to do mercy, delivering them from their enemies to worship Him. (Luke 1:67-75)

1. And Zechariah, his father, was filled with The Holy Spirit and prophesied. (Verse 67)

Holy Spirit: When a person is filled with God's Holy Spirit, he or she may speak for God to others.

2. Blessed (be) Lord, God of Israel, that He visited and He made redemption to the people of Him; and, He raised up a horn of salvation to us in the house of David, His servant. (Verses 68-69)

Bless God: He blesses God for three reasons. First, He has visited His people in human form in Mary's womb. Second, by this He has made redemption for His people, He will die on their behalf as a human. Third, He has raised up salvation in the powerful, eternal king from David's line He spoke of through the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7:8-16).

3. As He spoke through mouth of His holy prophets from the beginning: salvation from our enemies and from the hand of those hating us. (Verses 70-71)

Ancient prophets: These include Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and 'the twelve'.

Salvation: God saves His people from enemies, physical and spiritual, hating them for being His.

4. To do mercy among our fathers and to remember His holy covenant. (Verse 72)

Do mercy: Moses reminded Israel that because of Yahweh's mercy and covenant with their fathers, He took them out of Egypt with signs, wonders and a mighty hand that they would know Him; and, because of His LOVE for their fathers, He chose them, their descendants (Deuteronomy 4:31-37).

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Remember Covenant: God's covenant with His people is this: He is their God and they are His people (Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 11:4; 30:18-22; Ezekiel 36:23-28).

Application: We must all be sure that we are in a covenant relationship with the merciful God.

5. Oath which He swore to Abraham our father to give to us: without fear, from the hand of our enemies having been delivered, to worship Him by serving. (Verses 73-74)

Oath to Abraham: Yahweh's oath to Abraham was to give him many descendants, and through one descendant to bless all the nations of the earth (Genesis 22:13-18; see 12:1-3). 'The One' IS Jesus.

Gift: The gift is to continually worship The Covenant God by serving Him without being afraid of being harmed by any enemy. But this is no guarantee of physical life (Luke 21:16-19).

6. In piety and righteousness all our days. (Verse 75)

New people: This anticipates the gift of people being made new through the faith of Jesus in His death on the Cross and His Resurrection. After He sent the gift of The Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost all people may live in His Presence all the time being made holy and righteous by grace through faith.

B. His son will be prophet of the Highest, making ready His way and to give knowledge of pardoning of sins through God's tender mercies. (Luke 1:76-78)

1. But, thou also, child, prophet of the Highest, thou will be called. (Verse 76)

Prophet: John will be the singular prophet (messenger) sent ahead to prepare the way for the strong Savior from David's line (Malachi 3:1-4).

2. To give knowledge of salvation to His people in the pardon of their sins because the tender mercy of our God will visit us: the dawn of salvation from on high. (Verses 77-78)

Know: God's people will know they have been pardoned (forgiven) of their sins because the dawn of salvation (from sin) has visited them from heaven (on high).

Tender mercy: The word used here is plural, meaning God if full of mercy (literally in His bowels, but figuratively) from the depths of His heart. This is because He visited people as a person conceived by The Holy Spirit in a virgin woman.

Application: At Christmastime, and throughout the year, may we experience God's deep in His heart mercy and take joy our sins are forgiven IN Jesus.

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II. God appears to guide those in darkness and death to peace; He is to be eternally and universally praised because from on high He lifts up the poor and needy. (Luke 1:79-80; Psalm 113)

A. God appears to those sitting in darkness and death to guide them to peace; then John was growing in spirit in the wastelands. (Luke 1:79-80)

1. To appear to them (who) in darkness and shadow of death (are) sitting. (Verse 79a)

Appear: The dawn of salvation will appear to people sitting in the darkness and death of sin, the greatest enemy of every human soul.

2. (All this) is to guide our feet in way of peace. (Verse 79b)

Purpose: The purpose of the eternal and powerful Messiah-King from David coming and appearing to God's people is to guide them into the way of peace, even when all appears to be darkness and death.

Application: Let us all pray God will use us so all people will be given the experience of peace in darkness and death, even with all that is happening between Israel and Hamas in Gaza this Christmastime. (Philippians 4:4-6).

Zechariah: Here Zechariah is a prophet. He is anticipating the result of The Cross and Resurrection still thirty years in the future. But, The Holy Spirit has let him know the plan of the merciful God has been set in motion and will not be stopped.

3. And the child was growing and being made strong in spirit, and he was being in the wastelands until day of his public appearance to Israel. (Verse 80)

John: Yokhanan (John) grew to adulthood in the wastelands of the Judean wilderness, being made strong in his spirit to play his role in God's plan of salvation.

Application: Let us all realize that by God's loving grace and mercy, we too must be growing spiritually strong in the wasteland of our world today so we may prophetically announce (in God's LOVE) the salvation that is in The Savior-King who personifies God's mercy.

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B. Yahweh's Name is to be praised always and everywhere; being seated on high, He looks down to lifts up the poor and needy. (Psalm 113)

1. You all must praise Yah / you all must praise servants of Yahweh / you all must praise the Name of Yahweh // it will be, the Name of Yahweh, being blessed / from now and to eternity. (Verses 1-2)

Servants praise: This triple command to praise The Covenant God is directed to those who are His servants. People who are only serving themselves cannot bring themselves to praise God.

All time: He is to be praised throughout time, from this very moment into eternity!

2. From the rising of the sun (the place, east) until its going down (the place, west) / it is being praised, the Name of Yahweh. (Verse 3)

All places: Yahweh is also to be praised everywhere from the east to the west, in every time zone.

3. (He is) being high above all nations, Yahweh / above the heavens, His glory. (Verse 4)

Glory: His glory includes His honor, reputation and splendor.

4. Who (is) like Yahweh our God? / the one being exalted on high to dwell // the one making (Himself) humble to look / in the heavens and in the earth. (Verses 5-6)

Highest God: The unique and exalted God dwells above all His creation.

Sees down to earth: Yet, He becomes humble in order to look through the heavens, so He closely observes all that is happening on earth.

5. (He is) causing to be risen from the dust, the poor / from the ash heap, He will lift the needy // He causes (them) to sit with princes / with the princes of His people. (Verses 7-8)

Raises poor from dust: No one is more concerned with the welfare of the poor and needy than The Covenant God.

Application: We must learn to see ourselves as poor and needy so The Triune God will lift us up.

God lifts up the lowly

Seats with princes: He raises them and lifts them so they will sit with those humanly considered to be nobility, of higher rank. They are one people to Him. This foreshadows the unity of The Church of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22).

6. He causes to abide the barren woman of the house / the mother of children, joyful // you all must praise Yah. (Verse 9)

Makes barren fruitful: Yahweh can, and often does, make who, or what, is barren to be fruitful (Psalm 107:35-38; Isaiah 54:1; Galatians 4:27).

Conclusion: God has come to deliver people from their enemies and to worship Him. Through His tender mercy He pardons people's sins and guides those sitting in darkness and death to peace. He is worthy of praise because from on high He sees the poor and needy and lifts them.

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