

## GOD'S GRACIOUS VISITATION

Sermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> mid-week Advent Service 2025

Luke 1:57-80

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon tonight is our Gospel read before, Luke 1:57-80: <sup>57</sup> Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup> And her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. <sup>59</sup> And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, <sup>60</sup> but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." <sup>61</sup> And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." <sup>62</sup> And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. <sup>63</sup> And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. <sup>64</sup> And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. <sup>65</sup> And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, <sup>66</sup> and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

<sup>67</sup> And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,  
<sup>68</sup> "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for He has visited and redeemed His people  
<sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of His servant David,  
<sup>70</sup> as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old,  
<sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
<sup>72</sup> to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember His holy covenant,  
<sup>73</sup> the oath that He swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
<sup>74</sup> that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve Him without fear,  
<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.  
<sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways,  
<sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to His people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
<sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high  
<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace."  
<sup>80</sup> And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

John was not just another prophet; he was the one prophet in whom all the previous ones were gathered. John put in place the form of baptism so that, at the font, we pass with Moses through the

Red Sea, out of slavery to sin, and follow Joshua through the Jordan, with the mark of the triune God on our foreheads. At His baptism by John, Jesus was designated by the voice from heaven as the beloved Son who took the place of Isaac as the sacrifice for sins. By John baptising Jesus, the entire Old Testament was coming to life.

Christianity isn't just about words; it's about real events happening. Remember the Gospel from last Sunday: John was in prison and sent a message to Jesus through his disciples, asking whether He was really the Christ. Jesus answered, "*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them*" (Luke 7:22). God's words are confirmed by events that truly occur and things that genuinely exist. They are not promises hanging in the air; they are things we can see and touch. That's what the other John, the apostle John, once said, "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands...*" (1 John 1:1).

What does this have to do with our text tonight?

The angel Gabriel had been sent to the priest Zechariah to tell him his wife Elizabeth would have a child. For not believing that his wife would have a son in her old age, Zechariah was given a sign of God's *displeasure*. The father of the one whom Isaiah many years before had prophesied would be the "*voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord*"<sup>1</sup> lost his voice for not believing what God said.

As the neighbours gossiped about the kind of son Elizabeth would have, the father who had the answer could not say a word. His tied tongue was a sign to him of his *unbelief* and a sign to us that he was a *prophet* who, when God untied his tongue, ushered in the New Testament era with what is known as the *Benedictus*, announcing that everything that God had promised through the prophets since the beginning of the world *was about to happen.*

There can be no doubt that from childhood, John would have been told of his father's tied tongue, and that this was a sign of his father's unbelief, but it was also a sign to John too that his father was a prophet. His father's unbelief was a replay of Sarah's unbelief when she laughed at the thought that, despite her old age, she would have a son.<sup>2</sup> Every time she called her son by name, Isaac, which means "laughter," she was reminded of her unbelief. I'm sure that every time Zechariah called his son by name, he would have been reminded of his unbelief, but, as always, *God has the last laugh in doing things we do not expect, or think is impossible.*

As John grew up, devotions in Zechariah and Elizabeth's home likely involved now singing the *Benedictus* of words similar, since it focused on God and John's mission. These words captures theology in poetic form just like a psalm. "**Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David.**" David himself in Psalm 18 said of the Lord, "*He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold*" (v. 2). Now Zechariah uses this same term, "**horn of salvation,**" to refer to the Messiah. The key words are *visit, redeem, and horn of salvation.* In this context, visit does not mean a casual trip; God visits His people with *the purpose of redeeming them by offering Himself as the price for sins.*

Let's put this in fixed terms: without incarnation, there is no atonement; without atonement, there is no justification. All God's prophets have preached all of this since the beginning of the world. The

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:23

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 18:12

God of Israel works salvation not just by speaking a word of forgiveness but by offering Himself as the sacrifice. This is the God who people could see and touch. The God of Israel is “*Immanuel, God with us*.” After His resurrection, He reaffirmed this when He said, “*Behold, I am with you always, to end of the age*” (cf Matt. 28:20). He told us this would happen whenever we share the Sacrament with Him: “*I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom*” (Matt. 26:29). By Jesus’ resurrection, the Father’s kingdom that John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth announced was established. Here in the church, Jesus is present so that the blood He poured out to God as a sacrifice becomes a sacrament to us.

As you sing the Benedictus, you will find a summary of your faith. The Benedictus would also make a good Christmas card: “**Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, . . . the oath that He swore to our father Abraham.**” It carries more weight than simply saying, “Merry Christmas.”

Dear friends, we know how John the Baptist’s ministry ended — he lost his head. His crime was sermons that were not politically but rather theologically correct. But do you ever think of what happened to his father, Zechariah? After all, it was the father, not his son, who gave us the Benedictus. Perhaps like his son, he was put to death. It would not be inappropriate if Zechariah preceded his son and followed his Old Testament namesake as Jesus described in these words from Matthew 23:35, “*On you [brood of vipers] may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar*” (Matt. 23:35). Many prophets were innocently killed, and perhaps Zechariah was one of them.

In John the Baptist, the Messianic age had begun, and it is accompanied by the martyrdom of its preachers. All for what? Simply because John proclaimed the Good News that the Saviour had visited the world to be its Redeemer. As we prepare for the Christmas season, we remember that the Lord is coming again—not as a humble Baby in a manger, but as Almighty God to judge the world and bring us salvation. Let us therefore, not with tied tongues but with loosed ones, continue to proclaim salvation that comes through Jesus Christ, the almighty Son of God. Even so, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.