**March 24, 2024 Luke 1:68-79, John 12:12-16**

***Horn of Salvation***

**Scripture:**

*Luke 1:68-79 NRSV*

*(68)"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. (69)He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, (70)as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, (71)that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. (72)Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, (73)the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us (74)that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, (75)in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (76)And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, (77)to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. (78)By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, (79)to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

*John 12:12-16 NRSV*

*(12)The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. (13)So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord--the King of Israel!" (14)Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: (15)"Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" (16)His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.*

**Notes:**

1. ***Salvation*** has come!
   1. As we cry, “Save us!” the ***Savior*** comes.
   2. John is going to lead a life that departed from ***tradition***.
2. Zechariah’s Song begins with ***gratitude*** to God
   1. God has ***redeemed*** His people
   2. God is redeeming and bringing ***salvation***.
   3. John will be a ***prophet*** going before the Lord.
3. Zechariah’s song shifts to the ***Messiah*** .
   1. God will offer ***salvation*** and ***forgiveness***.
   2. God is ***merciful*** (v. 78).
   3. The light is coming “to ***guide*** our feet … ”.
4. So now we turn to The ***Triumphal*** Entry
   1. The people are longing for a ***savior***.
   2. They are looking to establish an earthly ***kingdom***.
   3. The palm branches and the donkey symbolize ***peace***.
   4. People are missing that ***salvation*** has come!
5. God is ***already*** working in our midst.
   1. John called people to ***repentance***,
   2. John ***pointed*** them toward Jesus,
   3. John ***prepared*** the way for Jesus.
   4. Jesus ***embraced*** unclean people.
   5. Jesus promoted the way of ***peace***,
   6. Jesus brought about ***salvation***.
6. Where is Jesus ***working*** in our lives?
   1. ***Embrace*** who Jesus really is?
   2. Make straight paths for the ***good*** ***news*** of Christ.
   3. God ***has***come, *has* remembered us, and ***has***heard us.
   4. Salvation has already come, and we have ***hope***.

**Script:**

As I prepared, I got to spend a few hours with each of my grandsons. I spent a lot of Friday and Saturday with Lucian as we made modifications to his bedroom. Then on Monday I got to spend a few hours with Jettson, while I watched him as his mother rested up for work and his dad focused on some projects he was trying to get finished. As I sat with each of them, my heart swelled with pride as I snuggled with them, as I played with them, and as I read their favorite books to them. And I had to wonder, what great things does God have in store for them as they grow up and mature, becoming their own individual person.

As I thought and contemplated these things, I was taken back to when my sons were young. I had such high hopes for my son’s and they have not disappointed me; in fact, I am very proud of what they are doing and what they have accomplished.

Perhaps you have wondered similar things about your own children or young relatives. Thinking about how their personality and behavior will influence their future, allowing them to grow into who they would become and what they would eventually accomplish.

But today in our passage we will be hearing a passage where a father, prophecies about his newborn son. He tells of the blessing he is to him and his wife. He goes on to talk about the things that this child will accomplish as he grows to maturity and becomes his own person. We know this child as John the Baptist; and this passage is known as Zechariah’s song. Zechariah’s song is usually an Advent text, yet there is something here that is so applicable to Palm Sunday.

The account of Palm Sunday—the triumphal entry—is found in John 12, where Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey with shouts of “Hosanna!” (which means, “Save us!”) ringing through the air. There is hopeful expectation of what Jesus is arriving in Jerusalem to do. The people place their coats and palm branches on the ground as they prepare the way for the Lord. As we read the two passages we have for this morning, I ask that you would stand with me and turn in your bibles to Luke 1:68-79 and John 12:12-16

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*(12)The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. (13)So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord--the King of Israel!" (14)Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: (15)"Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" (16)His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. John 12:12-16 NRSV*

After hearing these two passages together, we may begin to understand that it isn’t such an odd choice to read Zechariah’s song on Palm Sunday, in which Zechariah declares over his infant son (who will become John the Baptist as an adult), “You, my child, will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him”. Looking at these texts together illuminates something about Jesus’s work in the world: salvation has come! In the midst of the cries for a savior on Palm Sunday, the Savior came. That is the hope and the beauty of this day: as we cry, “Save us!” the Savior comes.

Let us begin by looking at the Birth of John the Baptist. Zechariah and Elizabeth had grown old without having children, yet they longed for a child. Zechariah was told by the angel Gabriel that they would have a child, but Zechariah found the prophecy hard to believe, so Gabriel struck him dumb until the day John was born. Elizabeth was overjoyed at the news that a baby was coming. Her cousin Mary, the mother of Jesus, visited Elizabeth when she was six months pregnant. Mary was either already pregnant herself or was about to be. Scripture says the baby in Elizabeth’s womb jumped when Mary came close he was already testifying to the presence of the Christ.

Zechariah did not speak again until the eighth day after John’s birth, when he sang a prophetic song at John’s circumcision, apparently in response to the question “What then is this child going to be?”. This question was posed in response to the miracles that surrounded John’s birth and also, in response to the surprise that they named the baby John instead of the expected Zechariah. Departing from tradition in naming the baby was an indication that John was going to lead a life that departed from tradition.

As one listens to Zechariah’s Song the song begins with gratitude to God because God has redeemed God’s people and “raised up a horn of salvation”. It’s really important to notice the tense here. We often read this text as if it points toward Jesus, and it does, but it also indicates the reality that God is actively redeeming and bringing about salvation in their midst. The people have been awaiting the Messiah, but Zechariah points out what is already happening *in the midst of* their waiting.

Zechariah goes on to remind them of the ways the prophets spoke of the Messiah. He declares that these are the things the prophets promised: Salvation (deliverance) from enemies. Mercy. Remembering the covenant. Freedom to serve God without fear. Practicing Judaism was often outlawed; there were Jewish martyrs from the years just prior to the New Testament. We also remember the stories of those who practiced their faith in exile, against the wishes of the ruling kingdoms.

After reminding them of the prophets of old, Zechariah declares that John will be a prophet too, going before the Lord to prepare the way for him (v. 76). This is a reference to Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. In Mark 1, we see that John the Baptist did indeed prepare the way for the Lord, pointing people toward Jesus as Messiah even while John baptized them and called them to repentance.

Then the song’s focus shifts to the Messiah and what he will do; offer salvation and forgiveness to God’s people. Why is God going to do these things? Because God is merciful. The song ends by pointing to the light that is coming to shine in the darkness “to guide our feet into the path of peace”.

So now we turn to The Triumphal Entry. The account of Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem in John 12 is not a parallel scripture to the song of Zechariah in Luke 1, but there are some important connections we can observe. The people are longing for a savior. “Hosanna” means “Save us!” Although they want to be saved, they are not looking for the kind of salvation Jesus is bringing. They are looking for their interpretation of what the prophets promised: someone who will establish an earthly kingdom where they can worship without fear. The palm branches and the donkey symbolize peace. Even though the people expect the peace to come by way of violent revolution, the cry of their hearts is still for peace in the end.

The people at the triumphal entry are missing the Messiah in their midst because they are looking for a political leader. When Jesus was born, people missed God’s activity in the same way because they were not looking for a Savior in a baby. An important message of both the John 12 and Luke 1 texts is that people are looking for salvation while missing that salvation has come!

God in Our Midst; we sometimes get so caught up in our ideas of how God should work, that we miss the ways and places that God is already working in our midst. Both John the Baptist and his cousin Jesus the Messiah arrived in the world and then lived in ways that were vastly different from what people expected. John grew up to be a wild man who lived in the wilderness, John called people to repentance, pointed them toward Jesus, and prepared the way for Jesus. Jesus was born into poverty; He never became an earthly king as the people hoped and expected he would. Instead, he embraced people who were viewed as unclean; he promoted the way of peace; through humility (rather than through power and might), he brought about a kingdom greater than any kingdom the world had ever seen. Jesus brought about salvation through love and sacrifice—unexpected ways.

Where is Jesus working to bring about salvation even now in our lives? Where do we need to lay down our expectation of who we think Jesus should be in order to embrace who Jesus really is? Where do we need to make straight paths for the good news of Christ to be shared in our world?

We arrive here on Palm Sunday, the sixth Sunday in the season of Lent, in much the same way that we come to Advent. We long for and expect God to save us. We plead with God to come, to do the work that was promised, to remember us, to hear us.

The good news for us now is the same as the good news of Christmas: God *has* come, God *has* remembered us, God *has* heard us. While we cry out for salvation, salvation has already come! It’s happening in our midst if only we have the eyes to see it. As we shout our loud hosannas today, may we embrace the reality that salvation has already come, and we have hope.