

Songs of the Season

St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)
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December 7, 2022

Midweek of Advent 2

The order of worship is based upon *Evening Prayer*, from *Hymnal Supplement 98* (CPH, 1998)

Service of Light

- P** The Spirit and the Church cry out:
- C** **Come Lord Jesus.**
- P** All those who await His appearance pray:
- C** **Come Lord Jesus.**
- P** The whole creation pleads:
- C** **Come Lord Jesus.**

Hymn of Light 888 O Gladsome Light, O Grace

- P** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
- C** **It is right to give Him thanks and praise.**
- P** Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of Your Christ; may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for You are merciful, and You love Your whole creation and we, Your creatures, glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- C** **Amen.**

Psalm 5

- ¹Give ear to my words, O LORD;
consider my groaning.
- ²Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God,
for to you do I pray.
- ³O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.
- ⁴**For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.**
- ⁵The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.
- ⁶**You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.**
- ⁷But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter

Advent Service Two

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your house. I will bow down toward your holy Temple in the fear of you.

8Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me.

9For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.

10Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you.

11But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.

12For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading *Luke 1:67-79*

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

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

P In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets.

C But now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.

Canticle Hymn (*Benedictus*) 936 Sing Praise to the God of Israel

Litany

P In peace let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For all pastors in Christ, for all servants of the Church, and for all the people, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For our public servants, for the government and those who protect us, that they may be upheld and strengthened in every good deed, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who work to bring peace, justice, health, and protection in this and every place let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in this congregation, those who toil, those who sing, and all the people here present who await from the Lord great and abundant mercy let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and need let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the faithful who have gone before us and are with Christ let us give thanks to the Lord.

C Alleluia.

P Help, save, comfort, and defend us gracious Lord.

Silence for meditation.

P Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ, our Lord.

C **To You, O Lord.**

P O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments; and also that we, being defended from our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, God forever.

C **Amen.**

P Lord, remember us in Your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

C **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

P Let us bless the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Presentation of the Offering

Office Hymn 351 Creator of the Stars of Night

Sermon

Prayer

P Dear Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of David, we look forward with joyful hearts to the approaching celebration of Your holy birth, grateful that You came here as one of us to lay down Your life as a ransom for sinners. You are our God, our everlasting King, and yet, so that You might rule sinners like us with grace and forgiveness, You left Your throne above, and appeared here in weakness, poverty, and humility. With perfect obedience You kept the law for us. In great anguish of body and soul You bore our sins even unto death for us, for You gave Yourself to be punished in our place. We praise and adore You, holy Jesus, for the precious gift of Yourself, Your very life for our salvation. Hear our prayers and hymns of praise as we lift our voices to You.

This Advent season enter our hearts anew with joy and peace and with all spiritual blessings.

Our Savior, we know that it is not the will of the Father that any should perish, but that all would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Fill the world with the Gospel's joyous sound, that hearts everywhere may reach out by faith to receive the precious kingdom You have brought, and together with us, enjoy Your gracious rule of mercy and forgiveness.

In Your great love prepare us for Your coming. Help us to welcome You as You come to us in Your Word, which grants our salvation, and in Your sacraments, which seal our pardon. Make us ready through genuine repentance to welcome You when You come again in power and great glory on the Last Day. We confess that we have often been self-willed, turning back again and again to our sinful ways. Do not on account of our sins rule us with a rod of iron, but rule in our hearts with Your love and grace. Keep our names recorded in Your Book of Life, and blot out transgressions for the sake of Your blood and sacrifice. Help us to see ourselves as willing servants of Your Gospel, so that with righteous lives and loving hearts we will ever praise You as Lord and Savior to others. To the glory of Your name we make these requests.

C **Amen.**

P Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C **Amen.**

Blessing

P The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C **Amen.**

Closing Hymn 878 Abide with Me

Silent Prayer

There are extra Advent devotionals in the basket found on the small table in the Narthex. Please take several and pass them out to friends, neighbors, or other family members. May these devotionals be a useful aid during this season of Advent.

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For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17

Second Advent Midweek Service
December 7, 2022
Luke 1:67-79

“Songs of the Season: The Benedictus”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Tonight we continue our Advent series, *Songs of the Season*, with another text that is connected to Jesus’ birth and has been included in the Church’s liturgy, the Benedictus. As is common in the Western Church, it is named for the first word in the Latin, which is rendered in English as “blessed be.”¹ Historically, it has long-standing use in the morning Daily Office, perhaps due to its allusion to the morning, “whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high.”² At the time of the Reformation, the Benedictus was placed in Matins as an alternative to the Te Deum, where it remains in *Lutheran Service Book*, and is also the canticle in Morning Prayer.

The occasion for Zechariah’s song, which Scripture indicates was a *prophecy*,³ began nine months earlier when he was completing his priestly duty of burning frankincense on the altar of incense in the Temple for the daily sacrifice and prayer. The angel Gabriel appeared and told him that he and his wife Elizabeth, who were without children and past child-bearing years, would have a son whom he was to name John, and that he would come before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah.⁴ With these words, Zechariah was told that his “miracle son” was *the promised forerunner* of the Messiah. John would fulfill what the Lord had spoken through Malachi, “Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me,”⁵ and, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”⁶

But after hearing the message that his and Elizabeth’s prayers for a child were being granted, after hearing the honor that he was given by being the father of the Christ’s forerunner, after all this, his faith in the “natural order,” that is, the recognition of their old age, overcame his faith in the Lord’s power and mercy, and so he doubted Gabriel’s message. And as a discipline upon his doubt, the Lord caused him to be mute until His promise was fulfilled.

Now it is nine months later and the child is born. And on the eighth day, the day of the boy’s circumcision,⁷ Zechariah saw to it that he was named John as Gabriel had commanded. And when he did this, the Lord opened Zechariah’s mouth and the Holy Spirit filled him, and he immediately spoke the words that have come to be called the Benedictus.

Zechariah begins, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.”⁸ When he first heard that he would have a son, he failed to bless the Lord. But after seeing God’s promise fulfilled, what he failed to do then he now does. Consider how this proves that God’s promises are *not dependent on our faith*, for if that were the case, *John would never have even been conceived*. On the contrary, God’s promises *create* our faith. He *is* faithful, thus we *can have faith in Him*. Because He always keeps His promises we can trust the promises He makes. Zechariah continues:

“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, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,”⁹

Zechariah praises God, but do you hear *why*? Certainly he was thankful for receiving his “miracle son,” yet John is *not* the main cause of Zechariah’s praise. Remember, he had heard from Gabriel nine months earlier that his son was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, and now that his doubts about having a son are removed, in faith he recognizes the *real* significance of his boy. If the forerunner of the Messiah has come, *that means that the Messiah is coming too!* Suddenly, Elizabeth’s words about her young relative Mary’s child make more sense to him.

And so Zechariah blesses God for “raising up a horn of salvation...in the house of his servant David.” The Messiah is here represented by a horn, which is a symbol of strength. This mighty Messiah was to be a descendent of King David, the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to him that, “Your throne shall be established forever.”¹⁰

This descendent of David would be strong, able to redeem God’s people. But why would *this* descendent of David be a “horn of salvation” unlike the others? Zechariah knows, for it was spoken by the prophets of old. He says, “*He* [the Lord!] has visited and redeemed his people.” Zechariah proclaims what the Old Testament taught all along, that the Messiah would be a true man, a descendent of David, but that He would also be the Lord Himself.

This shows that the faith of the Old Testament was not “obeying the Law,” but was in fact believing in the Messiah who would be both God and man. And that Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth, true God, the begotten Son of the Father from eternity according to His divine nature, and true man, the Son of David according to His human nature through His mother Mary. Jesus has redeemed His people, bought them by paying the necessary price, His holy life and divine blood offered upon the cross. And so we learn from Zechariah that our praise should focus foremost on God’s grace, mercy, and saving acts, centered in Christ Jesus. He continues,

“that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”¹¹

And so the Messiah would save His people from their enemies. Some try to bring political, earthly enemies into these verses because they assume that Zechariah, being a Jew, would want Israel restored. While that might well be true, remember that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. His personal wishes *are not expressed here*, for everything he says is *God’s Word*.

Because of this, Israel’s *earthly* enemies cannot be included in these words. After all, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 70 AD. And the current nation of Israel can in no way be seen as the fulfillment since first, they are not truly safe from their earthly enemies and, second and more importantly, Zechariah is speaking about a fulfillment made by the One that followed John, *Jesus*, whom the majority of Israelis continue to reject.¹²

No, Zechariah refers to the *real* enemies of God's people, sin, death, the devil, hell; these have been defeated by the "horn of salvation." For by Jesus' death and resurrection the sins of the world (also yours and mine!) have been taken from us as far as the east is from the west.¹³ By His death and resurrection, He overthrew death, so our bodies will rise from the dead. By His death and resurrection, the Serpent's head is crushed, and we are freed from Satan's rule. By His death and resurrection, we are rescued from hell's torments to live forever in heaven's glory.

And be sure, this promise is not only for Jews who believe in Jesus. It is for them. But the oath that God swore to Abraham was in part, "in you *all the families of the earth* shall be blessed."¹⁴ This is the promise that both Jew and Gentile would be saved through Abraham's descendent, the Messiah, who would defeat the spiritual enemies that hold the whole human race in bondage. And that is why we Gentiles can rightly join in singing the *Benedictus*, for we too have been included in God's saving acts since, through faith, we too are Abraham's offspring.¹⁵

Therefore we, along with all God's people, can serve God *without fear* because our true enemies, the ones that can harm us for eternity, have been beaten. We can serve Him *in holiness and righteousness* because our sins are no longer counted against us, and we are filled with the Holy Spirit who fills us with love for God and His commandments.¹⁶ Finally, Zechariah closes,

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."¹⁷

At last Zechariah does speak of John, and we now hear his role in God's plan of salvation. He will be the Most High's last and greatest prophet. He will prepare the people for God's coming in the man Jesus. He will give them knowledge of their salvation by proclaiming that their sins have been forgiven. John's whole ministry is founded upon the forgiveness of sins purchased by Jesus, who is the Sun of righteousness that shines the healing light of salvation upon we who were in darkness of sin and the dark shadow of eternal death.¹⁸ In the sunrise of the Gospel's forgiveness, we have been guided into the way of peace through faith in Christ Jesus.

The *Benedictus* began with the word "blessed" and ends with the word "peace." Blessed describes God, for He is deserving of our thanks and praise for the salvation He has won for us through the Christ's sacrifice. Peace, then, rightly describes us. For since our sins are taken away, we have peace with God now, a peace that lasts for all eternity. Therefore, we join with Zechariah and bless God for the salvation that He has won for us in the person of His Son, born in a stable, laid in a manger, killed on a cross, laid in a tomb, and now, risen and ascended, shining the light of His grace and mercy on us, giving us forgiveness through His Gospel. The bright Gospel proclaimed even in the song of Zechariah, the *Benedictus*.

In the name of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen!

¹ It has also been translated as “praise” or “thank,” but “blessed” is a more literal translation which also has a fuller theological meaning.

² Luke 1:78. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

³ Luke 1:67.

⁴ See Luke 1:5-25 for the account of these events.

⁵ Malachi 3:1a.

⁶ Malachi 4:5.

⁷ This was the day a male child was to be circumcised under the old covenant, see Genesis 17:9-14, especially v. 12. Jesus was also circumcised on the eighth day as part of His perfect obedience to the Law which is given to us sinners, see Luke 2:21.

⁸ Luke 1:68a.

⁹ Luke 1:68b-70.

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 7:16b.

¹¹ Luke 1:71-75.

¹² There are Christians in Israel and land controlled by it, but Christians make up only 2% of the population. Most of these are Arab Christians, but there are Jewish ones as well, usually referred to as Messianic Jews, but they compose a tiny portion of the already tiny 2%.

¹³ Psalm 103:12.

¹⁴ Genesis 12:3b (*emphasis mine*).

¹⁵ Cf. Romans 4:11. Now also consider Mary’s words in Luke 1:55.

¹⁶ Romans 7:22.

¹⁷ Luke 1:76-79.

¹⁸ Malachi 4:2.