Text: Luke 1:57-79

**Introduction**

This year’s arrangement of the calendar is the shortest that the Advent season can ever be with the 4th Sunday in Advent coinciding with Christmas Eve. That means you only have three mid-weeks. And we decided to turn one of them into a caroling party. So I picked as our Advent mediations the songs in Luke 1 – Mary’s Song and Zechariah’s song. And we are taking them out of chronological order, but I think in overall sense order. Advent gives us two Sundays of John the Baptist before turning to Mary that Advent 4.

**Text**

So I went with Zechariah’s – The Baptist’s Father’s – Song first. The story of the Baptist’s birth isn’t in the lectionary, so we don’t often hear it in church. It used to be a Sunday School staple, but I’m not sure about that anymore. But it is a very old testament-y story. An old couple – like Abraham and Sarah, but this time Zechariah and Elizabeth – too old to have kids. Zecchariah was a priest, in the Aaronic priesthood so the temple. And it was his turn to offer the incense which represented the prayers of the people. But when he went to offer it, an Angel appears to him and tells him that his prayer has been answered. He will have a son and name him John. The angel also tells Zechariah a bunch of other things about this John, but I don’t think Zechariah ever gets past the basic announcement.

I can imagine one response simply being, wonderful, so it takes 40 years to get an answer to such a prayer. What took you so long? And some of that sarcasm had to be in there, because of the Angel’s response I think. But Zechariah’s real response was “How shall I know this?” Which is something of a contrast with Abraham. I had to go back and reread it, but Abraham never really doubts that God will give him an heir, fulfill his promise. Abraham is just always prodding God and offering him other ways to do it. Hey God, right now Eliezer is my heir. Hey God, have you considered Lot, not Lot, what about Ishmael? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, but he thought he’d have to help God along. Zechariah, standing there before the altar with the Angel telling him his prayers have been answered, doesn’t believe it. He asks for a sign, as if the Angel Gabriel isn’t enough. And so Gabriel gives him a sign. You won’t be able to speak for 9 months or so.

He didn’t believe the promise, so he was unable to speak about it. There is something about the power of the Word of God in there. It is first of all about faith. Without faith in the promises of God what can we speak about? And that when the Word of God is spoken it accomplishes what it set out to do. Because the very first words from Zechariah after the Baptist’s birth are “His name is John.” Fulfilling the Angel’s Words. The rest of the Angel’s Words are fulfilled in the Song that immediately follows. Gabriel say that he would have “joy and gladness.” Zechariah’s unbelief is turned to belief when he receives his sign. And out of his belief he has that joy and gladness. “Blessed be the Lord God of israel for he has visited and redeemed his people.”

The promises of God are always kept. The Word of God accomplishes that which is promises.

And Zechariah’s song spells out for us exactly what those promises are. He holds that the prophets from of old told us. Whether we have been like Abraham and believed them, or more like himself and didn’t believe for a spell he skips, because in what you see happening is the horn of salvation raised up. And what is meant by that salvation.

First is deliverance from our enemies. “that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us.” The LORD God of Israel has raised up the one who would defeat Satan and the principalities and powers of this dark word. Those who have from the garden until today sought to destroy the people of God have a champion who has cast out the old dragon and all his host.

Second, this champion brings to us mercy. “to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.” The sin that lives in our members? Forgiven. Why? Because he promised. And God keeps his promises. He made a covenant with Abraham who believed it. And all who like Abraham believe shall find the mercy of God.

**Application**

Now we might ask why would God do such a thing? What is man that he would deliver him? Why would he show mercy. Zechariah’s song gives us two answers. First because he promised. It isn’t about us, but about who God is. He promised Abraham on the that faith. Second, that we might serve him without fear in holiness all our days. Most of our lives that fear lives somewhere. There is always some power or principality – be it power or money or status or fame or pain or suffering or death. There is always something that tries to rule us by fear. And in that fear we sin. That is what Hebrews tells us. “though fear of death we were subject to lifelong slavery.” Christ in his deliverance and mercy has given us his righteousness. And with his righteousness, eternal life. We no longer need to fear all those powers. Those powers have been defeated. Their time is short. Yours is long.

Zechariah knew this because he received the sign. How do we know this?

God has given us a light. The Baptist is one of those lights. The light himself is Christ. That is the light which comes into the world. The light given to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death to guide our feet in the way of peace. The light of the resurrection. The light of the Holy Spirit poured out. The light of the Word proclaimed that gives us knowledge of salvation and the forgiveness of sins. The light of all the Baptists in our lives that have gone before the Lord to prepare his ways. All those lower lights reflect to us the greater light of Christ.

Zechariah’s Song – his first words after a long silence – are a great shout of joy and gladness. They are his invitation for us to share in that joy and gladness. For the LORD God of Israel has visited and redeemed us – his people.