

2nd Sunday after Christmas
January 5, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
God Gives Satisfaction to Those Who Patiently Wait

Luke 1:68-79 (EHV)

Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited us and prepared redemption for his people. ⁶⁹He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰just as he said long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets. ⁷¹He raised up salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, ⁷²in order to show mercy to our fathers by remembering his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath which he swore to Abraham our father, ⁷⁴to grant deliverance to us from the hand of our enemies, so that we are able to serve him without fear, ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, because you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of God's tender mercies, by which the Rising Sun from on high will visit us, ⁷⁹to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Abraham waited for God to keep his promises...but not very patiently. Instead, he tried to fulfill God's promise to him of a son by adopting his servant and by having a son with his wife's servant. But God was faithful in his own time and a quarter of a century after God promised Abraham a son, Isaac was born.

Zechariah had waited many years for a son, but God did not give any children to he and his wife, Elizabeth. They were convinced they would never have any children. So, when God sent the angel Gabriel to tell Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son, Zechariah didn't believe God's angel. For the next nine months or so, Zechariah would have to wait in silence. For he was not able to speak. What a long time that must have been for Zechariah with a constant reminder that he had not believed God's promise.

Waiting patiently for God to keep his promises is one of the more difficult things we are asked to do. To Abraham, God was taking too long. To Zechariah, the promise was too big to believe. We are no better at waiting patiently for God to keep his promises either. At times we might misunderstand the promises of God. In addition, waiting patiently even when we understand how long we might have to wait is difficult.

Zechariah identifies the promises God is keeping with words like:

He has...prepared redemption for his people...raised up a horn of salvation for us...He raised up salvation from our enemies...to grant deliverance to us from the hand of our enemies.

Many of the Jews at the time of Zechariah would have heard these words and thought about their political situation. God is going to redeem us from Roman oppression. God is going to deliver us from the hand of Herod. Some would have thought about economic salvation. God is going to make our fields and vineyards prosperous. Our flocks and herds will multiply. Our businesses will flourish.

You can hear much of the same today from some of the loudest voices in visible Christianity. Especially at the beginning of the new year, some church leaders will promise that God is going to do great things for you in 2025. God will deliver you from your bad habits. He will save you from financial failures. God is going to raise up an economic windfall to save you from poverty. God is going to deliver you from every illness. God will save us from every enemy that wants to harm us in 2025. Those who promise such things are what is known as false prophets and we

recognize these health, wealth and prosperity false prophecies for what they are, lies.

Mostly...for we still might think at the beginning of a new year that this year is going to be better. And then we define what "better" means. We lay out the parameters for what God is going to have to do this year to meet our definition of a "better" year. However, God has not promised a "better" year to us by our definitions. We need to define and understand God's promises the way God defines and understands his promises.

Zechariah tells us God's definition of salvation when he tells us what his son, John, will do:

⁷⁶And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, because you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of God's tender mercies,

Salvation from our enemies is accomplished by the forgiveness of sins. That means the enemies are not the Roman oppressors. The enemies are not bad health or poverty. The enemies God promises to save us from are defeated by the forgiveness of sins. The enemy of sin is defeated when our sin was counted against Christ and no longer counted against us. The enemy who is the devil is defeated when our sins are forgiven, and he can no longer accuse us before God. The enemy of death is defeated by the forgiveness of sins because those who are forgiven will be raised to life again and live and rule with Christ forever.

Zechariah tells us why God would save and deliver and redeem sinners. "Because of God's tender mercies." This is a beautiful phrase, "tender mercies." Literally it might be something like compassions of mercy. The God who is holy and eternal has a deep feeling of love for you that moves him to show mercy. He looked upon his fallen creation and deeply desired to save sinners from our enemies. When we are waiting for God to keep his promises to redeem, save, and deliver, keep in mind his tender mercies, his compassions of mercy.

Zechariah tells us that the God of tender mercies does not forget his promises:

⁷¹He raised up salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, ⁷²in order to show mercy to our fathers by remembering his holy covenant,

God never forgot his promise to send the Seed of the woman to crush the devil's head. God never forgot his promise to bless all nations through the one offspring of Abraham. God never forgot his promise to send the Savior in the line of David. But it took a while for the Son of God to become flesh and dwell among us. It took a while for the Savior to arrive in our world, to live and die in our place in order to save us from our enemies of sin, death and the devil. It took thousands of years. How many gave up on God's promises in that time because their life was not going as they wanted? How many looked for earthly promises instead of the forgiveness of sins? Too many.

In Galatians 4, Paul tells us that God had it all under control and delivered his people at just the right time:

When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons.

God has kept his promise of redemption through Christ. How long do we have to wait patiently for God's promises of deliverance and salvation? Only God knows when he will bring us to eternal salvation. But the forgiveness of sins is always available. There is no waiting period to receive the forgiveness of sins. Jesus has made forgiveness available to all people.

But the forgiveness of sins is only delivered in the ways God has promised. Forgiveness is delivered through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. Certainly, that means forgiveness is available in every service, every Sunday. Through the Word of God in the liturgy,

the forgiveness of sins is delivered to repentant sinners, in the absolution, the readings, the hymns, the sermon and of course in Holy Communion. You only have to wait a week at most to receive his forgiveness regularly.

But you don't even have to wait that long. Christ's forgiveness is delivered directly to you through the words in your Bible. Christ's forgiveness is delivered to you from the mouths of other Christians throughout the week as we announce that we forgive and so does Jesus.

While we do have to wait patiently for heaven, we don't have to wait for the forgiveness of sins. Christ accomplished everything 2,000 years ago and delivers this precious gift to us through Word and Sacrament immediately and often.

Zechariah rejoiced when he could finally speak after those quiet nine months. Let us also rejoice in this new year as the Lord shows us his redemption, salvation and deliverance through the forgiveness of sins again and again.

Amen.