

Midweek Advent Vespers 1
St. Luke 1:1-25
December 5th, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Elizabeth Will Bear You a Son

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

Abraham's wife Sarah was barren. We read in the twenty-fifth chapter of Genesis that Isaac entreated the Lord because his wife Rebekah was barren. Jacob's wife Rachel was also barren. So then, each of the Patriarch's wives were barren until the Lord opened their wombs and they brought forth the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. From one of these tribes—the tribe of Levi—the priesthood was established. They were the ones appointed by the Lord God to offer up sacrifices on behalf of the people and to offer the prayers of the people of God on their behalf to God.

To this tribe of Levi, a man and a woman were born—Zacharias and Elizabeth. Like her ancestors who were called by the Lord to establish His Church on Earth were barren, so too was she. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth were advanced in age; beyond the normal age to bear children. But through them would be born the forerunner of the Lord + Jesus Christ. Even their names point to the promise of the Lord, for Zacharias means “The Lord Remembers” and Elizabeth means “God's oath.” So together their names mean “The Lord remembers His oath.” What was that oath? That the Lord God would send His Messiah to redeem His people from the power of the devil and from sin and death.

They would give birth to a son named, “John.” Whose name means, “Jehovah's gracious gift.” He would prepare the way of the Lord + Jesus Christ by turning the wayward Israelites back to the ways of their fathers, who were faithful to all that the Lord God had commanded them. His message would be repentance. He would tell the Israelites to turn away from their sin and the neglect of God's Word back to trust in the Lord God. This “John” would prepare the road for the Messiah by becoming the last of the prophets. He would prepare the way for the Lord + Jesus to fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies so that all people might find their salvation in Him. The Lord + Jesus would become our High Priest who offers Himself to the heavenly Father as a propitiation for our sins. This begins with a husband and wife from the tribe of Levi.

Much is made by the Evangelist St. Luke regarding the lineage of Zachariah and Elizabeth. Zachariah was a Levite of the division of Abijah. King David established twenty-four divisions from the sons of Aaron, Ithamar and Eleazar. Sixteen division from the sons of Eleazar and eight from the sons of Ithamar. The eighth division was allotted to Abijah—Zacharias' ancestor. What this means is that even though Zacharias was not the high priest, which rightfully belonged to the eldest son of the sons of Aaron, he was a descendant of Aaron. His wife Elizabeth, we are told by the Evangelist St. Luke,

was a descendant from the daughters of Aaron. This means that both of St. John the Baptist's parents were not only of the tribe of Levi, but were descendants of the first high priest of Israel—Aaron.

This also obviously means the St. John the Baptist was also descendant of the high priestly family. This is especially important when we consider what the angel Gabriel has to say about the duties of St. John the Baptist. He would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord God. He would be filled with the Holy Ghost from his conception. His office was a lifelong office. He who would be born because the Lord God made fruitful the barren womb of his mother would preach to the children of Israel so that they would no longer be barren of God's gifts, but be fruitful in faith toward the Lord. This would be done by proclaiming to them that the time of the Messiah's arrival was close at hand.

Just as we trust in the Lord through the preaching of His promises, the children of Israel would also cling in faith to the Lord God through the preached promise of the Messiah.

We see a picture of the lack of faith that was present in Israel in the doubt of the angel Gabriel's promise to Zacharias. *"How shall I know this?"* The children of Israel had been waiting so long for the promise of the Messiah that the proclamation of the promise fell on deaf ears. To Zacharias it was a promise that was too good to be true. He wanted proof of the prophecy—a sign. Something he could point to and say that that was proof of what the angel Gabriel was telling him.

Zacharias' doubt is even more telling when we consider the words of the angel Gabriel that his prayers were answered. These words have been interpreted two ways over the years: that Zacharias had been praying for a son, or that Zacharias had been praying, with the rest of the people of Israel, for the coming of the Messiah, which of the two makes more sense since it is reasonable to conclude that after he reached a certain age his prayers for a child would not produce what he desired, but that he would continue to desire the redemption of Israel.

And so, here is the angel Gabriel telling Zacharias that the forerunner of the Christ would be born from his loins, and he does not believe it. He does not believe that the very thing which he had been praying for was actually going to be received. And for a sign, he is silenced.

The Lutheran theologian, Dr. Martin Chemnitz, wrote regarding these events, "When the voice of the preacher is announced, the priesthood of the Old Testament becomes silent. The Levitical blessing is silenced, when the Seed comes, in whom 'all the families of the earth are blessed.'" That is to say, when St. John the Baptist's birth is announced to Zacharias, the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is silenced, for the High Priest—the Lord + Jesus Christ—is coming to be the once and for all time sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Therefore, this birth of St. John the Baptist marks the beginning of the New Testament era. It marks the beginning of the arrival of our Savior, + Jesus Christ in our flesh to make the barren Church—the people of Israel, fruitful again to make new believers in the Lord.

Today, it seems that the Church and Christianity is in similar straits. The promise of our Lord's return on the Last Day has been delayed so long, that it seems to us that it will never come; at least not in our lifetime. It will come at some much further away date and we will have to go on in this life bearing the slow and steady decline of morals and religion in this world. This is one of the reasons that the Church attendance seems to be on the decline in our society and in the world. The Church it seems at times has become barren; no longer giving birth to new Christians.

This is why this text is important for us in this Advent season as we await our Lord's return. It is important for us to remember that "the Lord remembers His oath." The Lord remembers His promise to us to come again and bring us to our eternal home. Let us never allow this promise to fall on deaf ears.

Let us keep hope in the promise. For, the Lord's promises are a sure foundation. Just as the Lord God fulfilled His promise of sending a Messiah to His people Israel, He will fulfill His promise to come to us again.

Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel—the wives of the Patriarchs—were all barren until the Lord opened up their womb. Elizabeth was barren until the Lord opened up her womb and she gave birth to the forerunner of our Lord. The Lord + Jesus through His Words and promises opens up the womb of the Church to create and sustain new Christians as we await the arrival of the Messiah. Therefore, let us not lose hope in the promises of God. He will fulfill them in due time. But let us rather cling to His Word and eagerly await His arrival. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!