

Midweek Advent Vespers 1  
St. Luke 1:1-25  
December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020  
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

You Will Have Joy and Gladness

*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.

Within the structure of the temple of the Lord there were two altars. The first altar was made of plated bronze. It was in the form of a grate. Upon this altar were burned away all the sins of the people as the priests daily made sacrifices to the Lord God on behalf of the people who brought their sacrifices to receive forgiveness for their sins. This altar of burnt offerings—that completely burned away the sins of the people as they offered their whole burnt offerings upon it—was placed directly in front of the doors of the temple.

Inside these doors was the Holy Place, and within the Holy Place was found not only the Table of the Showbread and the golden lampstand, but also the second altar. It was covered with pure gold. It stood directly before the door to the Most Holy Place—the Holy of Holies—in which was found the ark of the covenant; the seat that represented the Lord God's presence among His people and His throne of mercy for those who came before Him with contrite and believing hearts. Upon this altar of incense was burned and offered the incense that represented the prayers of the people of Israel. The fragrant smoke would go up before the Lord God with the prayers of all the saints. Even as the Church burns incense in her sanctuaries that represents our prayers ascending to the Lord God.

This altar of incense was before the throne of the Lord God, separated only by a thick curtain. The Lord God would hear the prayers of the people as He sat upon His throne—upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.

We find in the Gospel of the Evangelist St. Luke Zacharias the priest offering up incense on this altar of incense. This tells us a few things: first that Zacharias was a descendant of the high priest Aaron, for only the descendants of Aaron were allowed within the Holy Place, and only the high priest was allowed within the Most Holy Place, and then only once a year on Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. We are told by the Evangelist that Zacharias was of the division of Abijah, one of the divisions that were created by King David when he organized the structure of the temple service. We are even told by St. Luke that his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

So then, the beginning of the Gospel of St. Luke—the beginning of the story of the birth of our Lord + Jesus—begins in the temple of the Lord. It begins with the people of Israel outside the temple

praying as Zacharias is inside the Holy Place offering incense; offering up the prayers of the people of God. What is their prayer? Their prayer is for the coming of the Messiah—the Christ. We are even given an indication by the angel Gabriel what Zacharias' prayer was that day. For the angel Gabriel appears to him and tells him that the Lord God had heard his prayer. His prayer was for a child. Remember that Zacharias was “advanced in years” just like his wife Elizabeth was. She was considered barren; past the age of being able to give birth to a child. This is why it would be strange for Zacharias to be praying for his wife to bear a child. No, Zacharias, and all Israel with him, were praying for the coming of the Promised Anointed One—the Messiah.

The good news is that the angel Gabriel announces to Zacharias that his prayer has been heard. The promise for him is that he will be the father of the forerunner of the Christ. His wife Elizabeth will conceive and bear a son, and his name will be called “John.” John, whose name means “the grace of the Lord” will go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the way of the Lord. He will make straight the pathways for the Lord. He will preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He will usher in the arrival of our Lord and Savior. He will prepare the way of the Lord and Savior of all mankind. This is exactly for what the people of Israel had been praying. This is for what Zacharias had been praying. And when the angel Gabriel shows up and tells him that his prayer had been heard by the Lord God, what does he do?

He does not believe it. How much like Zacharias are we when we pray? We too are often buffeted with doubt that the Lord God hears our prayers. We doubt that we will receive an answer to our prayers. Our Lord God has promised to hear our prayers and grant us whatever we ask. This is especially true of our prayers for help and aid in spiritual matters. Our Lord + Jesus has come to us in the flesh in order that He might win for us forgiveness, life and salvation. He grants these things to us whenever we ask Him for forgiveness. The devil with his craft and wiles does not want us to hear that we have forgiveness. He wants us wallowing in despair and shame, or puffed up in pride. This is why we cling most faithfully to the promises found in the Word of God. For we may doubt and fear, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. His Word cannot be broken. He promises us forgiveness, life and salvation, and He will give it to us even before we ask.

The people of Israel had been praying for the coming of the Messiah for as long as there had been a promise made. They had gotten to the point where they really did not believe it was going to happen. Much in the same way that we may think that the end of the world is a long way off, or perhaps will not come at all. Therefore, it is not surprising that Zacharias, a man who had lived a long time in this world and had seen his fare share of disappointments, did not believe the words of the angel Gabriel when he received the good news of a child who would be the forerunner of the Christ.

For this he is silenced. He would not be able to speak again until after the birth of his son John on the day of his circumcision. This would serve as a sign that what the Lord God had promised would come to be fulfilled. This would serve as a testimony that the Lord God had heard the prayers of His people and would send them the Messiah, after He sent them His forerunner, John.

On the altar of incense was burned fragrant gums whose sweet-smelling smoke rose up to the nostrils of the Lord God and caused Him to remember His promise that He would not only hear our prayers, but that He would send to His people a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. This Savior would offer up Himself as a whole burnt offering for the sins of the whole world, and especially them that believe on the altar of the holy cross. He would offer up His life as a ransom for our lives. He would lead His people out of darkness into His marvellous light. He would bring us out of death into life.

Our Lord God has heard our prayers and He will come again for us, even as He came as a baby Boy in our flesh born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and continues to come to us now through His means of grace. He has heard our prayers and He continues to hear our cries and prayers for forgiveness, life

and salvation. He grants us for what we pray: He gives to us forgiveness, life and salvation through His preached Word and Blessed administered Sacraments. Therefore, my dear friends, let us kneel before the altar, the representation of our Lord God's presence in our midst—the representation of the throne of our Lord + Jesus Christ, and offer up to Him our prayer of thanks that He has heard our prayers and grants to us all joy and gladness in the knowledge that He has paid for all of our sins and won for us eternal life with Him and all the saints in Heaven. 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!*