

Christmas Day Devotions – Songs of Christmas from Luke ch.1 & 2

Zechariah's Song

I read once a description that helped me feel like I've walked in his shoes.

[NOTE: the indented portions are condensed and adapted from the source cited below]

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." Luke 1:18

We've all said words we've lived to regret. An exaggerated claim. A braggart prediction. Words we'd love to forget or retract, but we can't.

Zechariah's words became famous because, for what seemed like an eternity, they actually were his last words. What a shock when Gabriel silenced his voice box for three trimesters. Why? Simple . . . He doubted that God was telling him the truth: "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son – the one who will prepare the way for the Lord" (Luke 1:13-17).

We too have doubted God's truthfulness. God says so much wonderful news to us right here (holding the Bible); and we – though we'd like to forget – have often responded: "How can I be sure of this?" God has every right to silence us. Instead, he wants to silence our fears and remove our doubts.

He did that for Zechariah. Zechariah sat in silence as Elizabeth's tummy began to stretch. God was confirming the truthfulness of his promise before Zechariah's very eyes. Then, at the end of her second trimester, a pregnant virgin showed up at Zechariah and Elizabeth's door. And, Spirit-filled, Elizabeth knew and exclaimed that Mary's unborn baby is our "Lord."

If only Zechariah could use his voice again. He'd have some story to tell – all the things he had seen and heard, which were just as the Lord had told him!

The day came - his son arrived. Since Zechariah couldn't speak, when a question arose about a name, Elizabeth made clear: His name will be John. People protested. When given the chance to answer, Zechariah called for a tablet, and wrote: "His name is John." What the angel gave, Zechariah now unblinkingly confirmed. And the name isn't all that he confirmed. For as soon as his pen stopped scratching...

His voice returned. Pent-up praise danced from his tongue. Silence was replaced with song.

James Mattek. http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/december-2005/famous-last-words?page=0_1

He would go on to tell the angel-given news: John, his son, would go on before the Lord – preparing the way for the Lord to walk onto the scene. But if you want to know Zechariah's famous first words, recorded in Scripture, unloosed from his newly granted voice, look no further than down at your service folder. Here they are. You get to repeat them now. Make them your own praise. They are not about John. They are about another Son: Jesus. Even before his birth, Zechariah praises the coming of our Savior. On this Christmas Day, our voices praise Him too.

M: With Zechariah we say,

C: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David – as he said through his holy prophets of long ago." Luke 1:68

Mary's Song

It was a different type of horn than a musical one. Zechariah, in the words we just echoed, spoke of a horn. Kids, name an animal that has a horn? How does it use its horn? Think how the horn of an animal holds strength: it's used in battle; it's relied upon for victory over enemies. Zechariah says that the Lord has raised up his "horn of salvation." He is speaking about Jesus.

Yes, Jesus came to do battle. Jesus won the victory over sin, death and hell. He is the horn of salvation **for us**. He is our Savior. There's the essential note running through the songs of Christmas. All who put their faith in Christ Jesus are gifted his salvation. ... And that group includes Mary.

Mary would be the first one to object to what many have added about her over the years. She was not without sin. She is not someone to whom people should pray. She does not aid in saving anyone. How do I know?

Her objection to all such false claims are entered into the record in her own testimony found right here (Bible). You need go no further than the first sentence. In it Mary expresses what the rest of her soul's song is about. One word. One common refrain repeated through the four songs from God's Word that we hear this morning. The word? Savior. And about her personally? She sings: He is "my Savior."

And so Mary is a great example for us. We shouldn't skip past her display of simple faith.

Let's put ourselves in Mary's sandals. Who are we that God should shower his mercy on us? We're lowly sinners, by birth and by action. Yet, God has looked with favor on us. He fulfills his promises of mercy. He performed his mighty deeds for us personally: overcoming our unbelief through baptism and through the Word. He has brought you and me each to call to him "my Savior." And he has lifted us up with his word of forgiveness and assurance of heaven in Jesus.

Listen in each of the songs this morning for the Christmas news: "God as Savior" "Bringing salvation" "to those who fear him" – fear, understand correctly, in the meaning: honor and trust in him as our Lord & our God.

M: With Mary we say,

C: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation." Luke 1:46-47

Angels' Song

I didn't mention earlier Zechariah's final words: "...the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of **peace**." You don't have to travel far to connect Zechariah's song with this next song of Christmas.

Who can remember from last night? What happened at the moment the angel appeared to the shepherds, and flooded the sky with the glory of the Lord? [Shepherds afraid.] And what was the first word from the angel? [*"Don't be afraid."*] Later the army of angels sings of "peace."

This is not a peace among nations I because Jesus said that there would be wars and rumors of wars until he returned (Matthew 24:6). This is not peace in relationships I because sinful people have disagreements. This is not some kind of warm-fuzzy-feeling peace that all is right in our lives. This is peace between a holy God and unholy sinners. This is the restored relationship between God and humanity which sin ruined. This is the peace of a guilty conscience knowing that sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake.

<http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/december-2012/singing-songs-scripture?page=0,2>

The good news is... that in a world that is anything but peace-full: there is peace *for us* through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Where there is faith in Him dwelling in human hearts, there is peace with God through Him. There is no need to fear.

With the angels, let's make known the wonderful truth: God offers this peace to you, to me, to all.

M: With the angels we say,

Luke 2:14

C: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests!"

Simeon's Song

Take a glance ahead to the song of Simeon. I'll give you a minute to read.

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

I did that because I thought it would be fun to ask a question about the 4 songs of Christmas we've got here. There's no wrong answer. From what you've heard, do you have a favorite out of the four songs: Zechariah's, Mary's, the angels' or Simeon's?

You might have already guessed my favorite. [Pause to see if anyone mentions Simeon's name.]

I'd like to show you something, and say a few words as it falls under your eyes [hand out "Simeon's moment" painting].

The Lord promised Simeon: "You will not die until you see the Christ."



God the Holy Spirit somehow indicated to Simeon, "Now is the moment I promised."

Can you imagine him creeping up toward Mary and Joseph, to tap them on the shoulder, placing his hands together in a prayer: "May I hold him?" Or, did he shuffle up to them as quick as his senior feet could carry him, with arms wide spread ready to embrace?

How he got him, we aren't told. All we know is he took the Christ child in his arms, and said... the words that we in a moment will raise to our Lord in heaven ourselves.

This is a moment off the page of the Bible I've often pictured... *a face that shows joy to the point of elation, a grip that conveys his heart's desire realized, contentment/peace to a point words can't capture...* arms holding the eternal Son, now in the flesh.

In Simeon's later words to Mary we are reminded that Jesus was sent to suffer the punishment that our sins deserved: "a sword will pierce your soul." She would see Jesus' suffering and death. That piercing of her soul must have been even more intense when Mary thought about how Jesus was suffering there on the cross for her sins also.

The same is true for us as believers. It was my sin that put him there. My sinful anger. My sinful words of harshness. My neglect. My deceit. My disobedience. When you and I stand at the foot of the cross, how can the thought of Jesus suffering there for our sins not pierce to our very soul?

And yet, looking at that very cross is what brings us the peace that Simeon spoke of. By Jesus perfect life and by his death in my place, the Lord assures all of us who place our trust in him: your sins are indeed washed away and salvation is yours. That is the peace Simeon felt. That is the peace that is still ours today as believers. The peace of Christmas is ours every day that we continue to hear and believe the message of: God the Son born to save us!

M: With Simeon we say,

Luke 2:29-32

C: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."