**Home Service Sheet for Sunday 3rd November 2024**

Call to Worship  Isaiah 40:1-5

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

    and cry to her

that her warfare is ended,

    that her iniquity is pardoned,

that she has received from the Lord's hand

    double for all her sins.

A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;

    make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,

    and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,

    and the rough places a plain.

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,

    and all flesh shall see it together,

    for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, what an amazing plan of redemption that Your only Son, the Lord Jesus, should set aside His eternal, heavenly glory, and be born into His own creation! How amazing that His sinless lifeblood which pulsed through His human veins, could be shed as the full and final payment for the sin of the whole world! Thank You that His glory was revealed at His first coming, and that by faith in His sacrificial death and glorious Resurrection, we can have His Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We praise Your holy Name that although He was rejected as Your anointed King at His first advent, the day is coming when, as Prince of Peace, He will return to earth to crowned as King of kings and Lord of lords. Thank You that a day is coming when all people and nations will recognise the Lord Jesus as their King, when He returns in power and great glory to set up His eternal kingdom. In Jesus' Name we pray, amen.

Hymn  Give to our God immortal praise by Isaac Watts

<https://youtu.be/dzPrjJPOKOE?si=ACdk1Nxeh-4QYjHu>

Give to our God immortal praise; mercy and truth are all His ways;

Wonders of grace to God belong; repeat His mercies in your song.

He built the earth, He spread the sky, and fixed the starry lights on high:

Wonders of grace to God belong; repeat His mercies in your song.

He fills the sun with morning light; He bids the moon direct the night;

His mercies ever shall endure, when suns and moons shall shine no more.

He sent His Son with power to save from guilt and darkness and the grave;

Wonders of grace to God belong; repeat His mercies in your song.

Through this vain world He guides our feet, and leads us to His heavenly seat:

His mercies ever shall endure, when this our world shall be no more.

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, amen.

Bible Reading Luke 1:67-80

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

    for he has visited and redeemed his people

and has raised up a horn of salvation for us

    in the house of his servant David,

as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

that we should be saved from our enemies

    and from the hand of all who hate us;

to show the mercy promised to our fathers

    and to remember his holy covenant,

the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us

    that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,

might serve him without fear,

    in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

    for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

to give knowledge of salvation to his people

    in the forgiveness of their sins,

because of the tender mercy of our God,

    whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

    to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Reflection

Generally speaking, parents are the not the most impartial people in talking about their children. We tend to focus on the positives and downplay the negatives. If we are looking to the future of our children we would typically talk about the wonderful things that they may be capable of achieving through education, a career or because of their sporting abilities. What we have in our Bible reading today, though is very different. Zechariah has been unable to speak for over 9 months at this point and following his confirmation of his son being named John, God has loosed his tongue so that he can speak again.

Zechariah is described in verse 67 as being filled with the Holy Spirit, and in verse 68 Luke records for us the prophecy that he proclaimed. Prophecy is, first and foremost, a forth-telling of a message from God. It may refer to something that will happen in the future, but that is not essential. Rather, what is essential is the fact that the message originates with God. Zechariah is acting as God’s mouthpiece, speaking words of praise to God and proclaiming the wondrous things God would do in the near future through John. This prophet would fulfil the much earlier prophecy of Isaiah about one who would herald the arrival of the Lord, getting the people ready for the salvation that would come through the Messiah.

Within this prophecy there are some interesting phrases that we can find in the Old Testament. In verse 69 we read that God “has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David”. The thought behind this is that salvation is being announced with a loud fanfare on a horn. This salvation is public and available to all who hear the message. Also note that this saving is coming from the family line of David. The prophecy also reminds us that this is not a new message but is rather one that has already been spoken about by the prophets of old. God’s message to His people is consistent, and was fulfilled in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 71, Zechariah speaks of being rescued from “our enemies” and “all who hate us”. At first this may sound like a message of protection from human beings, but when we look at this as part of the bigger picture we find from Scripture, we will see this differently. In his letter to the Ephesians. Paul writes that our struggle is not “against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12) So, in this bigger picture, our enemy is Satan and his evil minions. That is what we are receiving salvation from through David’s descendant, the promised Messiah.

Zechariah goes on to place this prophecy within the context of God’s covenant with Abraham. This should make it clear to us that the ultimate fulfilment of God’s covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants is found in Jesus. The New Covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus is, in fact, the fulfilling of the Old Covenant. There is continuity between the two agreements, both of which originate with God and are made out of His grace and mercy towards us. Zechariah’s son, John, will have a key part to play in this message of salvation, but he is not the promised Messiah. Rather, he is the final prophet announcing the imminent appearing of the Messiah.

John’s message will announce God’s salvation to people by focusing on two important things. These are “forgiveness of sins” (v.77) and the “tender mercy of… God” (v.78). Forgiveness is only available to us because of God’s grace and mercy. None of us deserve to be forgiven because we are all sinners, worthy of death and destruction. However, God is full of mercy, and for this reason He sent His Son into this world to die in our place and pay the price for our sins. Jesus has paid the price so that we can be forgiven. John would prepare the way for this amazing and unique expression of God’s mercy, grace and love. Amen!

Prayer of intercession

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the many prophets who proclaimed the coming of the Saviour. We also thank You that by grace through faith we have believed their testimony and become part of Your body in Christ. Help each of us to be voices calling out in this wilderness of sin, proclaiming God's message of reconciliation to those that need a Saviour. Help us to testify of the truth of Your Word - that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners through His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection - and that by faith in His name, lost sinners may be forgiven their sin and declared righteous - to the glory of God, amen.

Prayer of Blessing

May You guide us and keep us today and through the days to come. Strengthen us and grant us wisdom in living out our lives to Your praise and glory. This we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.