

## **New Year's Day - January 1, 2023**

### **Sermon- Dawn of a New Day**

### **Scripture- Luke 1:57-79, CTW Hymnal reading 697**

### **Hymns- 202, 696, 429**

**Theme-** Isaiah Chapter 60 begins with this: "Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon YOU, and His glory appears over YOU. Nations will come to YOUR light and kings to the brightness of YOUR dawn." What have YOU done to prepare to reflect God's light onto others?

### **I. A New Day Has Dawned**

So, all the presents have been unwrapped and even some of the gifts have been exchanged. The leftovers are all but gone and we have had to let our belts out a notch or two. All seems well and we are happy as can be – or are we?

**A. Many people find themselves depressed during the weeks following Christmas.** We call it the "After-Christmas Let Down". For some, it is a brief pause; a time to catch our breaths and meditate. But for others, it is a lingering feeling of being overwhelmed by life itself.

I sometimes wonder if Mary and Joseph didn't feel some of that, too. What would it have been like for them? Jesus had been born, the shepherds had already come and gone, the angel had gone back to Heaven, and the dust has settled from the big event. And now they were left to raise a not-so-normal young boy in a normal world.

We sometimes forget that they were people just like us. They had to live the day-to-day life like we do. Joseph had to go out and

earn a living and Mary had to do the same things that other mothers and wives did. They had to deal with the daily routine - just as we still must do today.

**B. Sometimes, we feel overwhelmed by it all and tend to get down.** We succumb to the discouragement of the enemy. He does that so it will take our focus off the Lord.

We should understand what the word 'discourage' means. The Greek word for 'discourage' is 'hâtat'. The Greek definition of that word is - "To beat down - to make fearful - to frighten - to shatter - to destroy."

Yet, I see in Mary, one of the keys to coping with this problem. **Luke 2:19** says she "treasured all these things quietly in her heart". I think that as she got back into the swing of life, she kept all those feelings fresh in her mind. I don't think she put the experiences on the back shelf, as we tend to do once the holiday season is over.

Have you ever heard a tune that just keeps repeating over and over again in your mind? No matter what you do, it is in your thoughts all day long. I think Mary did that with the promises Gabriel gave her when he told her how she would conceive the Messiah.

**C. We need to do the same with our lives.** Every one of us has had a storm in the past year or so, and some of us are having one right now. We need to sit back and imagine what our lives will be like after the storm. Will we just go through this storm reacting, or by acting? Will we just go through clinging to the norm, or will we start putting a real faith to work?

There are three things I think we can take from today's passage and hang onto.

## **II. FIRST WE CAN REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR**

**US** The passage I just read is actually a **Psalm of praise** and focuses on a number of things that God has done for us.

**A. In verse 68, we see the first thing God did through Jesus: "...He has come and has redeemed His people."**

The idea of 'redemption' is a buying back of something, a rescuing at a great cost. It was a term of great significance to the Jews of that day, who were once again under severe oppression of a distant government. We see several hints in Zechariah's Psalm of his political situation, but the overall essence is purely spiritual.

In verse 69, it talks of a 'horn of salvation'. Horn is used here as a symbol of strength. To paraphrase it in today's English, we could say that 'He has provided us with a mighty Savior.'

Now this is very significant. Many people miss this next thing. Zechariah begins by prophesying over his son, John (**later to be known as John the Baptist**) but ends up focusing on Jesus as the Messiah. He is telling us that God has furnished us with a mighty Savior.

We could stop there when recounting the things God has given us. We could just sit back and do as Mary did. We could ponder these things quietly in our hearts. But God is not done yet.

**B. Verse 70 reminds us that God promised us a Savior long ago.** In **verse 71**, he again expresses the theme of salvation for his people. **Verse 72** introduces to us one of the most motivating characteristics of God. It tells us of God's MERCY.

Before we go on, let me explain mercy. Many people think that mercy means kindness. Mercy does have kindness in it, but that is not the entire theme of mercy. Mercy means: "to bestow great kindness or concern to someone in considerable need **who does**

**not deserve it."** That is mercy. It goes way beyond simple kindness.

We must always remember that God showed concern and loving kindness to us, an undeserving people, in our time of great need. And, God is still doing that today, over 2000 years after sending His Son to us as a sacrificial lamb to cover our sins.

**C. In verses 72-75 Zechariah boldly brings up the promise God gave to Abraham – to rescue the nation of Israel from the hands of their enemies.**

And there is something very important for us to remember in verses 74 and 75. It tells us that God enables us to serve Him without fear! **Without fear!** Fear is one of the most devastating things to a Christian.

Fear of persecution can range from rejection to physical threats or even death. Not only does it say we can serve Him without fear, but it says we can do so in holiness and righteousness for our entire lives.

I think that serving God is seen today as more of an obligation than a privilege. It should be the foremost priority of each one of us, but too often, today's Christian can be hesitant to serve. It becomes a duty and is therefore seen as negative rather than the positive that it really is.

In the days of Jesus, serving was viewed as an honor, a distinct privilege. Today, it is viewed as something we have to do if we are to be a Christian. In Jesus' day, they looked forward to bringing their offerings into the storehouses of God.

Today, we cringe at the thought of actually giving the 10% God told us to give. I heard a man say once that if God were as stingy with His gifts to us as we are with our gifts to Him, we would not even have had Jesus in the first place.

Zechariah had the right outlook. God gave us a most beautiful gift. The gift of allowing us to worship Him and serve Him. We should gladly grab onto the many opportunities we have to serve Him and worship Him, in and out of the local churches.

We should realize that tithing our wealth, time and talents is an opportunity to serve Him. To serve in the youth departments or the praise and worship teams is a golden opportunity.

So, as you come down from the Christmas high, and get settled back into the life you normally have, you will occasionally feel the "After Christmas blahs". It is during these times that you must remember that those daily things that seem to get you down, are really blessings that enable you to use them to serve God.

### **III. SECOND, WE CAN REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED US...**

**A. In verse 76, Zechariah talks of how his son will be a prophet and will go before the Lord.** We know that this baby grew up to be John the Baptist, who came just prior to Jesus, and John foretold of Jesus and who He was. In **verse 77**, he prophesied of how his son would one day proclaim the coming of the Messiah and how that Messiah would offer the forgiveness of sin.

Look at the spiritual state of our town, our country and even the world. Those same promises need to be proclaimed today, also. Many Christians in America have heard the promises and have responded but need desperately to hear them again. We need to be told over and over about how God's desire is to forgive us and have us serve Him without shame.

I don't know what sins you have brought with you this morning, or what guilt you may be suffering from at this moment, but I do

know one thing: Jesus Christ offers you the complete forgiveness of all sins just as much as He offered those over 2000 years ago. There is power in the forgiveness of sins and the ability to change to be Christ-like.

**B. But, along with forgiveness, we receive a duty. We have an obligation to God to point others in His direction.** We need to boldly proclaim the message of God's loving salvation for all peoples.

As we wind down from Christmas, we can cling to the promise God gave us. God gave us the promise of eternal life, through His Son, who was born in a manger.

And it is that promise that will lead into the third thing we can hold onto as we prepare for our new year.

#### **IV. THE THIRD TO REMEMBER WHERE FOLLOWING GOD WILL TAKE US...**

**A. In the last part of verse 79, at the very end of Zechariah's Psalm, he reminds us that God isn't finished with us yet.** He still has more to come. God's desire is to guide us into the path of peace.

I am so thankful that the best is yet to come. I am so glad that we have not peaked spiritually. And that is a very important thing to remember as we ready ourselves to enter into another new year.

Let us remember that God does have all kinds of good things in store for us. He has all kinds of new opportunities for us to serve Him, to witness for Him to WHOEVER we know and meet.

We will have many times that we can experience His closeness during times of joy and during times of troubles. We must remember that through everything that lies ahead, God's single most important desire is to **lead our feet into the paths of peace, which is righteousness through Him.**

After Christmas, as things get back to normal, we sometimes can wonder what it was all about. It was all about the baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem, and our response to that as a fact for our lives.

**The baby who would grow up to be the Savior of mankind, was sent by God to offer us THE WAY to Heaven.**

**B. So, what do you think you will remember most about this past Christmas as time goes by?** Chances are, it will not be the gifts you received that were under the tree. I pray that we all will remember the gift to that was hanging on the tree. The tree of Calvary...**and then live a life of response to that fact!**

We have some decisions to make. It is a brand-new year. It is time. As we step out of one year and step into another year, doesn't it make sense for us to make sure we do it right and not haphazardly? This year, let us walk into the New Year wisely.

Let's evaluate where we stand with the Lord Jesus, so that when we go into 2023, we go in with Him as our guide. But before we can do that, **we must first make a decision to do it.**

Psalm 37 reminds us to commit everything we do to the Lord. **Trust Him** and He will help you identify **HIS** plan for your life and then follow it with all your heart!

**Today is that day; the day of decision. Amen? Let Us Pray that we are all up to the task. Amen?**