

Theme: **The Child who is Zechariah's Hope**

Text: Luke 1:5-22

Date: December 2, 2018

Occasion: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, Co

*Grace and peace to you as you find the child who is the Hope of the world, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

The silencing of Zechariah is quite an extraordinary event. Zechariah was a priest who made his living with his voice. His vocation was to bless, to pray, to teach and to proclaim. And yet, there he stood—like a quarterback without an arm—voiceless in the temple, unable even to finish his temple service with the customary blessing. Furthermore, Zechariah was a descendant of the priestly family of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Aaron's part in the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt was to speak eloquently. Yet, Zechariah, a son of Aaron, could not utter even a single word.

The even greater irony is that Zechariah's name anticipated the kind of news Zechariah received from the angel that day in the temple. His name means "God remembers." And when Gabriel told Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a child, even in her old age, God was remembering His people in the way He had promised. For when the Bible talks about God remembering, it is not simply His rummaging around in His memory bank, when God remembers, He acts. So, God remembered His people on the day Gabriel told Zechariah he would have a miraculous son, a son who would be the forerunner of the promised Messiah. God's action that day in the temple fulfilled Zechariah's own name in the ultimate way. Yet, the one whose name means "God remembers" did not believe that God was about to act. He forgot. He forgot God's wondrous actions of old. He forgot what God did for Abraham and barren Sarah, Isaac and barren Rebekah, Jacob and barren Rachel. He forgot just how good God is, and he doubted God's Word. So, what about you and me, do we remember?

Zechariah and Elizabeth are both described as "righteous before God." That's because their hope was in the Lord and in His promise to act and send the Messiah. Zechariah prayed regularly for this to happen. Yet when the Lord answered his prayer, he doubted the word of the angel and sought a sign. His offense was not in expecting too *much* from the Lord. It was in expecting too *little*. What are we expecting from the Lord?

A story is told of a beggar who approached Alexander the Great for alms. Feeling exceedingly generous, Alexander ordered the beggar to be given the government of five cities.

The beggar was taken back by this generosity and said, “I didn’t ask for *that* much.” Alexander said, “You asked like the man you are; I give like the man I am.” Our God is generous. He gives us exceedingly great and precious promises. He invites us to ask and has promised to answer. He gives us more than we either desire or deserve. He is exceedingly generous. That’s who *He* is. But we, like Zechariah, so easily forget that. We don’t expect that much from God. That’s who *we* are.

We, like Zechariah, are priests who easily forget. God’s indescribable goodness has made each of us His royal priests through Holy Baptism. God, in mercy and has chosen each of us as His own possession and set apart our voices to do priestly work—to pray, to teach and to proclaim His goodness. We all have every reason to be bold and confident in our prayers. But instead, we’ve doubted this and have often thought, “What good will my prayers do?” We all have every reason to be confident in the Lord and His directing of our lives, but we’ve doubted that He knows what He’s doing. We all have every reason to live with joy in all circumstances, knowing that we are beggars who have been granted a kingdom; yet we live and think and pray like God is stingy and disinterested in helping us. We are the royal priests for the King of kings. But we often insult the King by not expecting much of Him. We often ask as people of little faith and that grieves the Holy Spirit. We are just like Zechariah. We so easily forget God’s fatherly goodness given to us each and every day.

But *God* does not forget, He *remembers*. God does not forget His promises, and He does not forget His priests. He remembered Zechariah’s prayer and acted. God gave Zechariah way more than he expected. Zechariah hoped for the Messiah, and God gave the Messiah within his own generation and extended family. Old Zechariah hoped he might father a child, and God gave him a *great* child—John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Greater Child who was God in the flesh. The ultimate instance of God remembering each of us and His promises to us was to send the One to whom John the Baptist pointed too, the One who was the greatest and most faithful Priest ever. He would perfectly remember and trust the Father’s goodness in our place. He would always have a confident hope in God, even in the most hopeless situations. He would do all this so that His faithfulness might be credited to you and me in our Baptism. He would be not only the most holy Priest but also the most holy Lamb. The Lamb of God sacrificed for you and me, the Lamb whose blood would atone for all our doubts and mistrust of God.

Because God has remembered us, we have a “**great high priest**” (Hebrews 4:14), and great He is. He used His voice mightily to bless, to pray, to instruct, and to gather sinners, like you and me. He was the most faithful Priest, but He chose to be silent before His accusers and to go to an unjust death in our place. He was the Greater Aaron, hanging on a cross with arms outstretched like a priest in prayer, uttering an eloquent absolution: “**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**” Jesus is the Greater Zechariah, who *always* remembers and never forgets His Father’s unspeakable goodness. He never lost hope that His Father would raise Him from the dead as promised. Jesus is our eternal High Priest, seated at the right hand of God as our intercessor and advocate. He is our Savior, who has come and will come again to take us to be with Him forever.

We must never forget the people we are. Like Zechariah, we are poor, pitiful beggars, deserving nothing good from the Lord. But we must also never forget who the Lord is: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love for you and me. God remembered Zechariah and gave him a son to proclaim and prepare the people for the Messiah. God remembers our need for forgiveness and acts, providing it for you and me in Holy Absolution. He remembers our need for holiness and acts, providing it for you and me in Holy Baptism. He remembers our need for strength and the courage to live under the cross with patience and joy and He acts, providing it for you and me His Holy Supper.

During the Advent season, we are especially reminded that we are waiting for the appearance of our blessed hope, Jesus Christ, who will bring us into His glorious kingdom, beyond anything we can imagine. Yet even now, He exceeds our poor expectations. We ask Him for some comfort for our wounded consciences, and He applies a double portion (Isaiah 40:2). We ask Him to give us a little help in our trials, and He gives us a Kingdom. We ask for help enduring the pain of disease and sickness, and He gives us the promise of full and complete healing in our resurrection on the Last Day.

At John’s birth, Zechariah’s voice would again be heard. He said this in response to all that God had given to him, “**Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people<sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,<sup>70</sup> as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old,<sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;<sup>72</sup> to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant,<sup>73</sup> the oath that He**

**swore to our father Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup> that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear,<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.”** (Lk 1:68-75) What is our response to all that God has given to us through the Christ Child? At another child’s birth, soon thereafter, there where angels’ voices that would be heard on earth asking, *What Child Is This?* This Child is Jesus Christ, the Savior, Zechariah’s hope and ours. The one who came to save the world from the darkness of our sins, death and the devil. So, let us use our voices to proclaim the hope that we have been given before we fall into silence once again. Amen