

December 8: Second Sunday of Advent

Message: Song of Faith

Scripture: Luke 1:67-79 (Zechariah's song)

Text: Luke 1:64 "Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God."

Memory Verse: Luke 1:68 "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to set His people free."

Theme: The waiting of the prophets is coming to an end! Zechariah joins the chorus with a prophecy about his own son John, who is also a prophet! God is going to act in a decisive and final way. God will remain true to his promises and salvation is on the way.

Blurb: The songs of Christmas fill the air. Perhaps you find yourself humming them! But are you listening to the message? Some songs talk about cheer, snow, and Santa. Others speak of a Savior born in Bethlehem. This Sunday we'll sing songs of Christmas, but we'll also experience how the original songs of Christmas bring us hope, peace, and abundant life. Come and sing—with your whole being—the Christmas songs of faith!

Incorporated Carol: "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" (#196)

Also, "Blessed Be the God of Israel" (#209)

Opening Song: *Joy* -Sanctify

Welcome: -David

Memory Verse: -David

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to set His people free." -Luke 1:68

Worship Music Set: -Sanctify

Angels from the Realms of Glory/Emmanuel

Blessed Be the God of Israel

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Worship Prayer -Andrew

Offering: *It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas* -Sanctify

Serve: Christmas Camp & St. Andrew's Shelter - Andrew

Advent Candle & Kid's Time: Candle of Faith -Andrew

Bumper: Songs of Christmas

Message: Songs of Christmas: Song of Faith

PP#1: Songs of Christmas: Song of Faith

“Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.” -Luke 1:64

Songs of Christmas: Song of Faith. Luke 1:64 “Immediately Zechariah’s mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.”

PP#2: John 1:1, 14 [Note: Please keep the formatting on the slide to look like poetry]

1 In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
14 The Word became flesh
and made His home among us.
We have seen his glory,
glory like that of a father’s only son,
full of grace and truth.

We are singing our way through Christmas! The songs of Christmas help us celebrate, put us in the mood, resonate with our feelings and yearnings, and help us put words to what it’s all about.

Last week Pastor Andrew taught us that the original songs of Christmas come in the Bible. They are passages of poetry, and although we normally just read them, they are intended to be more than information. Song—poetry—is a higher form of communication. It engages more than just our cognitive minds. It connects with our feelings, our deeper expressions. We need to invest our whole beings to really connect with it: our minds, hearts, bodies.

Too often we read God’s word as simply information, as something we have to learn and understand. But remember that the Word of God is not the printed Bible, but the very person of Jesus. John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word. The word was with God, and the word was God....The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” By the way, that is also written as poetry.

If God wanted us to simply understand, He would have provided just a book, like most other religions claim. But God wanted us to experience His Word, experience Him, and so He sent a person, Jesus, our Savior and Messiah, born at Christmas.

So, as we prepare for Christmas, we prepare not just to *learn about* Christmas, not just to *understand* Christmas, but to *experience* Christmas!

To do that we need to open our hearts to a relationship with the Savior born at Christmas. And the stories of His birth we don’t just read. We sing them, a whole body-experience.

That’s why songs are so important at Christmas!

PP#3: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;

dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Let's take a look at an enduring classic of Christmas carols. Of course, it just happens to be by Charles Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism, and brother of John Wesley. If you prefer it in print, it's in your hymnal on page 196. Page 1 - 9 - 6.

I bet this is a familiar carol. But as a song of Christmas, let's come to this song trying to experience it, to get into the story, let it seep deeply into us, drawing us in. First of all that means not just singing it rote. Listen to the words, and connect with what it is saying. But even more than that, let it wash over you, trickle deeply into your soul.

I'm going to read through the song once, and I want you to try to cognitively understand it's message. Then, I'll ask us to sing it together, so we can engage it with our whole beings. So, follow along as I read it:

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

PP#4: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

2. Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

2. Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Are you connecting? Did you get goose bumps as you realized what this song is really saying? Christmas is when the long-expected Savior finally came! Let that soak in! Christmas is about peace, because Jesus comes and takes away our fears, because we can trust in Him to face whatever is ahead. It'll be okay, because this Jesus goes with us. He is our strength, the hope of our world, a King ruling in our very own hearts.

Is it stirring you? Is it capturing your whole being?

PP#5: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,
 born to set thy people free;
 from our fears and sins release us,
 let us find our rest in thee.
 Israel's strength and consolation,
 hope of all the earth thou art;
 dear desire of every nation,
 joy of every longing heart.

Then we must sing it! Not just our minds, but our hearts, our feelings, our whole selves. Sing it with me, would you?

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,
 born to set thy people free;
 from our fears and sins release us,
 let us find our rest in thee.
 Israel's strength and consolation,
 hope of all the earth thou art;
 dear desire of every nation,
 joy of every longing heart.

PP#6: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

2. Born thy people to deliver,
 born a child and yet a King,
 born to reign in us forever,
 now thy gracious kingdom bring.
 By thine own eternal Spirit
 rule in all our hearts alone;
 by thine all sufficient merit,
 raise us to thy glorious throne.

2. Born thy people to deliver,
 born a child and yet a King,
 born to reign in us forever,
 now thy gracious kingdom bring.
 By thine own eternal Spirit
 rule in all our hearts alone;
 by thine all sufficient merit,
 raise us to thy glorious throne.

Did you experience that? Were you lifted? Raised up into the presence of Jesus on His glorious throne? We must sing of Christmas! It is so incredible!

Well, now we are ready to go to back into Scripture and engage one of the original songs of Christmas.

PP#7: *Image for Isaiah 9:1-7, the Christmas promise, in a beautiful and Christmasy image.*

Last week, Pastor Andrew told us how the prophets of the Old Testament sang songs of anticipation, of getting ready for God's salvation to come, songs of hope for people stuck in darkness, trapped in sin. The carol we just sang also shared that: Jesus is long-expected, come to set free people trapped in sin and fear.

As we come to Christmas, we must get into this narrative, put ourselves into this yearning. How are you trapped? Struggling? Feel in darkness? Are you there, too? How does fear grip you, keep you prisoner? Can you connect? You, your own stories: can you see how your story aligns with this narrative described by the prophets? Do you ask where your hope comes from? Do you strain, looking for light to dawn? How will you be set free from your mess, being trapped, even by what you do and who you are?

PP#8: *Image of the angel Gabriel appearing to the priest Zechariah*

The Christmas story begins in Luke, chapter one, with the miraculous birth of a baby before the miraculous birth of Jesus. An older, childless couple named Elizabeth and Zechariah, who although love God, feel the sting of barrenness, childlessness. They prayed for years for a child, but had calcified in resignation and defeat.

When the angel tells Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth is going to become pregnant and bear a son, he speaks words from his resignation, from his cognitive mind, words of disbelief and doubt. You know, I think that's what I would do. I would be Zechariah!

The angel then says that he would be unable to speak until the baby is born. He was issued a time of waiting, of yearning, of anticipation.

Remember, this is poetry! God was using their lives to help us see what this longing described by the prophets looks like: God's people, trapped in lifelessness. No hope for a future.

And then, Elizabeth becomes pregnant, years after menopause. God, literally and symbolically, is showing how He can bring life in barrenness, hope to defeat.

PP#9: *Image of pregnant Mary visiting pregnant Elizabeth*

Then, in Elizabeth's third trimester, the virgin Mary, now also pregnant with Jesus, comes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. They rejoice and sing of God's miracles, the joy of God's unfolding salvation. Luke 1:42, Elizabeth sings, "God has blessed you above all women, and He has blessed the child you carry. Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to her." (Luke 1:42-45)

PP#10: *Image of pregnant Mary singing her Magnificat, Luke 1:46*

And then Mary bursts out in song. If you look in your Bibles, to Luke chapter one, you will see Mary's response—it's verses 46-55—is written in a way to show it's poetry. And in most Bible's it's titled, "Mary's Song." In English, it loses it's cadence and rhyming, but Mary sings, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!" Do you see how this is a full-body experience for Mary? Mind, heart, soul? She continues singing about what God has done and is doing. We'll come back to it on Christmas Eve and sing this song together.

PP#11: Songs of Christmas: Song of Faith

1. We respond (faith) to the salvation God brings for us.

Meanwhile, Zechariah is standing in the shadows, off in the corner, unable to say anything.

He was a priest, and he knew the prophets. And as the women were singing and celebrating, he hears the prophets singing in his mind. He connects the dots. God is doing it! He is bringing salvation. The Messiah is coming. The people walking in darkness see a dawning light.

When Elizabeth goes into labor, the whole village gathers. On the eighth day they come to name the baby, and everyone expects the name to be Zechariah, like his father. Elizabeth speaks up and says, “No, His is to be called John.”

Everyone is surprised, because there is no one in their family with that name. So they ask Zechariah if he agrees. He writes on a slate with chalk, “His name is John.”

PP#12: Songs of Christmas: Song of Faith

1. We respond (faith) to the salvation God brings for us.
2. We experience what is too incredible for words.

At that very moment, his mouth was opened, his tongue loosened, and he was finally able to speak again.

What does he say? He doesn't *say* anything. He has been literally waiting for nine months. He and his people have been waiting for the coming of the Messiah for hundreds of years. He is living this story—literally—himself. He is experiencing it all in his own life. Freedom! Joy! Light! Peace! It is too incredible for speaking.

PP#13: Songs of Christmas: Song of Faith

1. We respond (faith) to the salvation God brings for us.
2. We experience what is too incredible for words.
3. We sing with our whole being: mind, body, and soul.

So, he sings! He is filled with the Holy Spirit, and he sings of the wonderful salvation God is bringing. It's a song of faith, his response to what God is doing. He proclaims it with every fiber of his being, his mind, heart, and soul.

Turn in your hymnals to page 208. Here we see our Scripture passage for today, the song that Zechariah sings. It's from Luke 1, verses 68-79. You see on page 208 it's titled, “Canticle of Zechariah.” Canticle means song sung together in worship. In Latin it's known as *Benedictus* because the first word of the song, blessed, in Latin is *benedictus*.

By the way, that's why at the end of worship services, I say, “receive this benediction.” It doesn't mean “ending.” It means, receive this blessing!

PP#14: The Canticle of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79)

Page #208 in the red hymnal

So, this is what Zechariah sings. It is a song of faith, a response back to God, blessing God, and proclaiming the salvation God is doing. And as a song, we need to understand it cognitively, but we also need to experience it with our whole beings.

Again, it's poetry, and in the original language it has a cadence and rhyme. We sang it earlier in the service today: there it is across the page, at number 209. But I bet it was rather unfamiliar, and because of that, you struggled to really experience it fully.

So, let's take a look at this song again. I'm going to read it first, just to better understand what it's saying. But then, we're going to sing it, as a liturgical canticle, reading it responsively and using the sung response at the top.

So, take a look at Zechariah's song of Christmas, a song of faith.

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to set the chosen people free." In Jesus, God has come, showed up. He has come for the purpose of setting His people free. The chosen people used to be Israel, but now it is all who follow Jesus.

"The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Savior from the house of David." The old royal lineage of David continues in both Mary and Joseph, and therefore in Jesus.

"Through the holy prophets, God promised of old to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us; to show mercy to our forebears and to remember the holy covenant." Zechariah is hearing the songs of the prophets, promising a coming Messiah who will bring deliverance from our enemies. In Jesus, the greatest enemies of sin and death are defeated! This is all part of the same covenant from ancient times, a covenant of personal relationship between God and people.

"This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship without fear, holy and righteous in the Lord's sign, all the days of our life." Our response of faith to what God does is to trust and worship Him now.

PP#15: The Canticle of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79)

Luke 1:68-75 - Prophecy about Jesus

Luke 1:76-79 - Prophecy about John

At this point, Zechariah switches from talking about Jesus to talking about his own son, John, and the role he will have in announcing the coming of the Messiah. "And you, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High God, for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way, to give God's people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins." John's life's work will be to announce to people that Jesus is the Messiah, and to point people to follow Him. In Jesus, God is bringing forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration. Let that soak in. Are you following John as he points to Jesus, takes you to Him? Are you struggling in sin, needing forgiveness? Do you know darkness in your heart? Does it drag you down? Are you despairing? You can know that God gives salvation through Jesus by the forgiveness of our sins!

"In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

PP#16: Songs of Christmas: Song of Faith

1. We respond (faith) to the salvation God brings for us.
2. We experience what is too incredible for words.
3. We sing with our whole being: mind, body, and soul.

Do you feel those goose bumps again? God's tender compassion for you brings the light of hope dawning in your life. He offers a path, illuminated, a way of peace for you in your life!

Zechariah feels this with every fiber of his being, as he sings whole-heartedly his response of faith to God.

Let's do this song again, singing it liturgically.

PP#17: The Canticle of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79)

Page #208 in the red hymnal

I'll read the light printed text, you respond in the bold printed text. And wherever you see a red "R" that's when we sing the top line, also a familiar carol of Christmas. We'll practice it once, and then we'll do it again together.

Let's try it!

["Canticle of Zechariah" Page #208UMH]

Stay on this page, #208. Let's go back to this song one more time.

This time, we'll use it as our prayer time this morning. You'll notice I saved the prayer time until now. That's because today our carol is a song of faith. And rather than *learning about* how it is a song of faith, we're *experiencing* it, making it our act of worship. So, just as Zechariah prayed this song as pouring out his heart before God, I want to invite us to pour out our hearts before God using this song, too.

[Prayer: Canticle of Zachariah]

Amen!

Closing Song: *Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates* -Sanctify

Memory Verse: -David

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to set His people free." -Luke 1:68

Announcements: - David

Benediction: - David