

JJ¹

What is the first thing you do with your mouth when you get up in the morning? I know that sounds like a strange question, but what do you do? Yawn? Complain? Brush your teeth? Tell your spouse you love them? What do you do? How awesome and appropriate it would be if the first thing that came out of our mouths was praise! What if as we woke up the first thing we did was to speak up with the faith God has so richly blessed us with, saying, "Lord, thank you for keeping me safe this night and giving me another day to serve you"? I can't imagine a better way to start the day.

Today as we finish making **FAMILY PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS**, we see that **Faith Reveals Itself in Praise**. We see this most especially in God's servant Zechariah who, after nine long months, regains his ability to speak and the very first thing to come from his newly opened lips is praise to God. As we look at these words of praise, we see that we too have every reason to reveal our faith in praise.

Now just think for a moment how every morning Zechariah woke up during those nine months and was reminded of his sin of doubt. Every morning he woke up silent, unable to speak. He couldn't

verbally praise God. He couldn't say, "I love you," to his dear wife Elizabeth whose womb was carrying their miracle baby. He couldn't teach anymore at the local synagogue. He couldn't sit down and have a normal conversation with his friends. Even when Mary came to stay with them he couldn't talk to her about the joy that was in his heart over God's promise of the Savior now being fulfilled.

Finally came the day for John to be born, and yet he still couldn't speak. For eight days he couldn't speak to his newborn son! You can be certain that the devil came with temptations of frustration and anger. Gabriel had promised that he wouldn't be able to speak until the LORD's promise was fulfilled. Well, here he was, with his son in his arms and he still couldn't speak!

Then on the eighth day, the day of circumcision, everything changed. Here again we see Zechariah and Elizabeth walking in all the ways of the LORD. Just as the LORD had instructed Abraham to circumcise every male born in his house after eight days, Zechariah and Elizabeth obeyed the LORD's instructions. Circumcision marked John as a "son of the covenant." It was on that day that the child was given his name.

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Now in Jewish culture the custom was to name the son either after the father or after someone else in the family. It was very unusual to give a child a name outside of the family. That's why the friends and family react the way they do when Elizabeth told them, "No! He is to be called John." Not trusting Elizabeth's words they went to the head of the family who would straighten everything out. Luke tells us, "He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, 'His name is John.' Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God."

And we have those words of praise that came from Zechariah's newly loosened lips. Luke tells us that this wasn't just any ordinary praise. It was praise inspired by God the Holy Spirit! "His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied." Before us today we have one of those rare instances when a believer who wasn't called by God to be a prophet or apostle is given that unique gift of verbal inspiration by the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? It means that the words, although they are Zechariah's words coming from his mouth, are actually the very words of God being spoken through him!

Zechariah's preparations for Christmas concluded in letting his faith speak out to his community in praising God for all he

has done. As we look at Zechariah's words of praise we see that we too have every reason to make **Family Preparations for Christmas** by letting our faith shine out through praise.

Zechariah begins: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel; because he has come and has redeemed his people."

Right away Zechariah acknowledges the one he is praising. He knows it is the covenant God, the God of The Promise, the LORD, who has done all these things.

When he says "he has come" he literally says, "he has visited his people." You see, our God didn't just come into this world to travel through it and see the sights but have nothing to do with us. He came to live with us! He is Emmanuel—God with us! He came to live as one of us, making himself subject to his own

laws so that he could keep them in our place. He came so he could die our death for us. He came to redeem his people!

And now I know it looks like such a little thing, but look at our text in verse 68, the verse we're looking at right now. Notice that Zechariah says "he *has* come and *has* redeemed his people." Yes, Jesus is in the world, even though he's still growing in Mary's womb, but notice that Zechariah doesn't say that "he will redeem his people." Even though Christ's redeeming work wouldn't be completed *in time* for



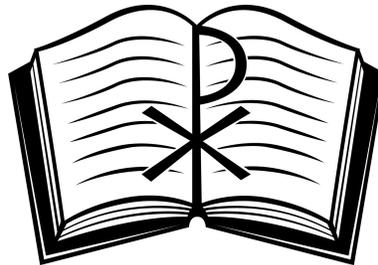
another 33 years, to Zechariah it is accomplished fact. God has kept his promise and sent his Son, just as he said he would "in the house of his servant David." There is nothing that is going to stop him from keeping his promise to redeem us. Friends, this reminds us that every promise our God makes to us is as good as done. We simply wait for them to be fulfilled in our lives in God's own time. Truly a reason to let our faith shine out in praise to God!

God gave his Son, Zechariah tells us, to bring us "salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us..." The devil's life-draining clutches have been released. Through faith we don't belong to him any longer. He doesn't have a hold on us and does not have any claim to our lives. There is no one or no thing that can hold us captive spiritually. Yes, this world could even bind us up with chains and put us in prison, but our enemies can do nothing to harm us because we have God on our side and in the end will deliver us from this evil world! Another reason to open our mouths and praise our God!

And then Zechariah tells us God has also done all this "to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." Because God has set us free from being slaves to sin and the law, we don't serve God because we fear being judged and

condemned by him. In fact, it is the complete opposite! We serve him all the days of our lives because he has not condemned us but condemned his only Son in our place! We serve him out of love and thanksgiving. We serve him in true devotion because he is the one who has made us righteous in his sight!

We have this knowledge "through the forgiveness of sins." And that forgiveness has come to us personally "because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the Rising Sun (Dawn) 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."



Dear friends, we have every reason to open our mouths every morning and praise our God for all he has done for us! By his mercy our Rising Sun, Je-

sus, has shined his love into our sin darkened hearts! The Rising Sun will guide our feet to walk in the path of his peace all the way until we reach our eternal rest in heaven! Dear friends, open your mouths and let your **faith reveal itself in praise** every morning, noon and night. Continue making your family preparations to celebrate the first Christmas, keeping your feet on the path of peace, waiting for the Lord to come again! Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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