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Expository Sermon

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ARISE AND SHINE FOR THE LIGHT HAS COME

Scripture Reading - Luke 1:67-80

Text - Luke 1: 76 – 79.

Introduction

We are now in the final weeks before Christmas and all the preparations will be over in a short time. We may feel like the man who said that the Christmas holidays mean anticipation - preparation - recreation - prostration and recuperation. The final few days before Christmas is so often a hive of almost desperate activity which at times results in a frantic rush to purchase those last minute gifts. The world rushes on with very little time to reflect on solemn and sacred event which took place over two thousand years ago. The contemporary Christmas scene presents a very different picture to that of the first Christmas in its quiet beauty and humble simplicity. A weary young couple, Joseph and Mary, bed down in a barn because there was no room for them at the inn. They found a manger in which they placed the baby Jesus. It was a pretty crude cradle for the

young Prince of Glory. His first cry, mingled with the lowing of the cattle and bleating of the sheep, signaled His arrival on planet earth. He had entered this planet unobtrusively and quietly. There was no fanfare of trumpets to herald the entrance of the King of Kings into time and into history. Certainly there was no write up in the Bethlehem times and no cantatas in the synagogue proclaiming His miraculous birth. There was none of the fanfare which we like so much, nevertheless something was astir that night. God was at work quietly, deliberately and redemptively. Unique events were unfolding in unusual ways. This was God's moment to enter into this world as a man. His coming had been promised and prophesied and the scripture tells us that in the fullness of time "God sent forth his Son into the world born of a woman." Gal. 4:4. It was the hour in which God determined to come to this world and to "pitch His tent" among us. We must remember that while it is true that God was at work that night He does not work in the way we do. His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. They are unfathomable but must not to be dismissed simply because we do not understand them. He does not need our permission or approval to do things His way. It is clear that as events were unfolding, God was getting His message out into the world. Simple humble unknown shepherds in a field tending their sheep heard the message of the angels that a Savior was born in the city of David. This baby's birth must have been extraordinary because at least three kings from the east came and bowed in worship of Him, and what is

more they gave Him gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. What is so amazing is that a star, a bright star, the brightest in the sky led them to the Christ Child. And while the world slept and society went about its business, tremendous things were taking place all about them. The glory of God was being revealed. It seemed like eternity was moving into time. And the world, principalities, powers and the rulers of this dark world held their breathe and shook in fear while Son of God, the creator of the universe, was gently laid in a manger. It was the birth of this extraordinary Child that gave rise to the angels singing “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to all men.” This birth stirred heaven and its choirs sang about it and while the world in its darkness and sin slept on God came to us in Jesus.

John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah in his prophecy Luke 1:68-79, described Jesus as “the Rising Sun.” His words are important for he spoke “of the tender mercy of our God, by which the Rising Sun will come to us from heaven to shine.....” He is the designated as the Dawn or the Rising Sun. The King James Version has it, “the Dayspring from on high will come to us or the Spring of Day.” In this description of Jesus as the “Rising Sun” Zechariah is saying that this is,

1. THE PRONOUNCEMENT OF A NEW DAY. Luke 1: 67-79.

A new day had dawned in the history of man. It is a day of light and a day of hope. The ‘Rising Sun’ or “the Spring of Day” came to this earth.

Now it is clear from this passage of scripture that when Jesus came as the

Dawn, it was the fulfillment of,

a. THE WORD OF PROPHECY. Luke 1:70. Zechariah was clear on this truth. Jesus had arrived as the Dawn or the Rising Sun just as God said “through His holy prophets of long ago.” If you study the scriptures you discover that Jesus is the main subject of Old Testament prophecy. “Like so many widely spread search-lights focusing upon one bright object in the sky, the divinely-inspired authors of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament Scriptures centre their attention upon the coming Christ from varying distances of time, covering more than fifteen centuries. These inspired writers of the Old Testament story described in detail with amazing accuracy, the advent, the birth, the ministry, the suffering, the death, the resurrection and the coming reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was the focus of their attention and the centre of their message.” And when the angel told Joseph that Mary though a virgin would give birth to a Savior, the scriptures significantly say that “all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.” His coming was a fulfillment of prophecy.

Furthermore His coming was the fulfillment of ,

b. THE WORD OF PROMISE. Luke 1:72. Zechariah comments on this in verse 72. He makes clear that God “remembered His holy covenant, the oath that He swore to Abraham.” The promise of the coming Messiah was made at the beginning of time. After man had sinned God promised

that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpents head. Genesis. 3:15. The prophet Malachi declares that the “Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings.” And the Prophet Isaiah had something to say about it too, “For to us a child is born - to us a Son is given.” Malachi again records the words “suddenly the Lord who you are seeking will come to His temple, the messenger who you desire will come says the Lord Almighty” Malachi 3:1, and Zechariah confirms that the “Rising Sun will come to us.” The word of prophecy and the word of promise is the pronouncement of a new day.

But Zechariah also emphasizes,

2. THE PROMISE OF A NEW DELIVERANCE. LUKE 1: 68,78

Zechariah filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied in verse 68, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people.” The key words here are “The Lord God of Israel has come and **has redeemed His people**”

The new deliverance about which Zechariah speaks is founded on three basic truths. They are important truths about the redeeming activity of Lord God of Israel. They are redemptive truths of which we should be reminded at this time of the year.

Notice that there emerges from this passage of scripture a sense of

a. THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD. Luke 1:68,78. “The Lord God of Israel He has come....” “The Rising Sun has come to us,” He did not send a

messenger or an angel as a redeemer. It is vital that we highlight the truth that God has come to us in the person of the Christ Child. Wesley captured the core center of this truth in vivid phrases “veiled in flesh the Godhead see –Hail the incarnate Deity.”The incarnation is a vital truth because it is indispensable to our salvation. Zechariah says this clearly in verse 68, “The Lord, the God of Israel... Has come and has redeemed His people.” Redemption is dependent on the Incarnation. God came to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His purpose was to save us in and through His atoning death on a cross and mighty resurrection from the dead. The incredible truth which we proclaim at the Christmas season is that the God held in awe - The God who is radiantly majestic in His holiness condescended to come to us. Again Charles Wesley helps in our comprehension of this mystery in his memorable words “Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.” This in itself is an awe inspiring and magnificent truth. You see gods generally don’t do this kind of thing. Pagan gods are distant gods. Pagan gods are detached gods. Pagan gods are disinterested gods and indifferent gods. They are remote gods withdrawn from men, disregarding their needs and unconcerned about their predicament. Many times they are angry raging gods who have to be appeased by sacrifices - sometimes human sacrifices. It was men and women who had to make overtures to their god to try and gain his favor and find salvation. They had to get his attention

and hope that maybe he would help them. But the Lord God of Israel was different. His uniqueness lies in the truth that when men and women took one step away from Him, He took one step towards them. When Adam and Eve sinned against God - they hid from Him - and men and women have been hiding from Him ever since that moment of disobedience in the Garden of Eden. They hid from Him, but it was He who pursued them - who sought them out. "Adam where are you? Where are you Adam?" And so began His timeless pursuit of mankind. When God came to us in Jesus Christ He took a gigantic step in His purpose to bring salvation to the human race. This really is quite an astounding truth when you think about it and come to a better understanding of what it is all about. We might feel with Micah when he wrote "who is a God like you who forgives our sins?" There is only one answer to that question. There is no God like Him. He is unique. The God who lays His glory aside and comes to us, is unique indeed, for His visit to earth would save us from our sin. Zechariah knew this to be true when said, "Blessed be the God of Israel because He has come and redeemed His people. He is our hope of salvation."

In our day the Christmas event has become the battleground of special interests and humanistic thinking. The raging controversy whether we should say merry Christmas or happy Holidays, or whether we can display biblical signs and symbols on public property because of the concern for the separation of church and state, is somewhat stilted and superficial. The furor of the A.C.L.U. over it all borders on insanity. It is a clear

indication of their incredible ignorance of what Christmas is all about.

They are obsessively compulsive about it all. These so called ideologies have missed the whole point of the Christmas event. It is not a political issue. It is an event which is larger than all of these boiling controversies, indeed it overshadows them all. Its' message is one of hope and deliverance from the inherent malignancy in man. It is the answer the bondage of sin which plagues mankind. It simply announces that over two thousand years ago God came to us in the Christ Child to redeem us from sin and its eternal consequences. It seems illogical to stifle a message that will free men and women from the source of all the problems in our world. God is the God of all nations and all cultures. His salvation offer is all humankind and His love embraces the whole of the human race. He did not come to one segment of the world's population. The scriptures are abundantly clear on this truth. He **"so loved the world** that He gave His one and only Son." "The Rising Son has come to us." The amazing message is that He has come to and for all of us, including His enemies. Such is the uniqueness of our God.

The second truth evident here and upon which this redemption is founded is

b. THE FAITHFULNESS OF OUR GOD. Luke 1:70-74. Zechariah in his prophesy declared that "God has raised up a horn of salvation for us....." and then note the his words **" through His holy prophets of God long ago...."** What God said He would do, He did... "the Rising Son...." has

come to us.” And Zechariah outlines this saving deed of God by highlighting two eternal facts.

i. That salvation has come to the world through the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 1:68. “He has come and has redeemed His people.” Furthermore

(ii) Salvation has come to the world because of the faithfulness of God. He fulfilled His prophecies and kept His promises to men. “The Risen Sun has come to us.” Note that Zechariah makes quite clear how faithful God has been to us. Luke 1:70. Note first that

He kept His word through His holy Prophets. Luke 1:70.

Second observe that He made and kept His holy covenant. “He showed mercy to our fathers and remembered His Holy Covenant or Holy agreement and the oath He swore to our father Abraham.”

Zechariah’s intention is to show that when God makes a promise or makes a covenant He fulfils them. When God commits Himself to someone or something He is faithful to that commitment. He promised that one day a Redeemer would come and scriptures announced that He had come.

Such is the faithfulness of God. But this redemption is also founded on,

c. THE MERCIFULNESS OF GOD. Luke 1:72,78. In verse 72, Zechariah refers to the “mercy of God.” Mercy is one of the dynamic words of redemption. Without mercy there is no hope. And in verse 78 He clearly tells us that “the Rising Sun” has come to us because of the “tender mercy of our God.” It is clear that mercy is one of the great words of the Bible. It

gathers together the truths of love and grace. Mercy declares to the world that “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” John 3:17. We know that the world deserves His condemnation and it has merited His judgment, but God saw that it needed His mercy. It deserves eternal death, but God has reached out in mercy. It has earned His judgment, but He offers His mercy. It deserves hell but gets heaven when His mercy intervenes. Redemption is founded on the tender mercy of our God. The prophet Micah says that “our God delights to show Mercy.” He continues, “you will again have compassion on us – you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea..” Micah 7:18-19. And Daniel knows that the “Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him.” Daniel 9:9. Zechariah carefully choosing his words talks about the “tender mercy of our God.” These words shed light on the sensitive nature of His mercy for it is described as “tender mercy.” It allows us into see part of the loving heart of God. This mercy is tender mercy - sympathetic mercy – compassionate mercy - redemptive mercy. It is in direct contrast to that mercy which sometimes the law grants. It is what I call legalistic mercy – detached mercy - impersonal mercy. It does grant reprieve but really has no heart to it. The mercy of God, however, is tender mercy. It is more than reprieve. It is Divine mercy that pulsates with and is compelled, not by law, but by love and grace. It is the mercy of an eternal and loving God who is not willing that any should any die, but that all who with godly

repentance forsake their sin and follow Him will find salvation.. He came “because of the tender mercy of our God.” Note once again what Zechariah says, “because of the tender mercy of our God by which the Rising Sun will come to us.” It is mercy which constrains God to involve Himself with the human race redemptively. The mercy of God is amazing. The biblical writers are caught up in it. They are carried away by the flood of its immense and lavish embrace. They vividly express themselves about it in different ways, and yet one gets the feeling that its’ meaning is allusive and ultimately defies a satisfactory explanation. It seems that there are no words in the English vocabulary that can adequately describe its full meaning and reveal the depths of its inner treasures. This does not discourage the writers in their efforts to communicate the greatness and majesty of Divine mercy. **The Psalmist says God’s mercy is limitless in its extent.** Note his words “the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him. Psalm 103:17. **It is boundless in its scope.** “Your mercy is great above the heavens.” **It is long suffering in its nature.** “For the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in in mercy.” Psalm 86:15. K.J.V. And Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:4 that **it is inexhaustible in its riches.** “But because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.” And the Rising Sun who is Jesus, is the very incarnation of mercy. He not only shows mercy, He is mercy. Paul said that when “the kindness and love of

God our Savior appeared, He has saved us not because of the righteous things we have done but because of **His great mercy.” Titus 3:4-5.N.I.V.**
Charles Wesley wrote so eloquently ‘Tis mercy all, immense and free, For O my God, it found out me.”

An ancient Saxon story tells of a king in whose country a rebellion developed. The king set out with an army to quell the insurrection. Soon things were in control again, with the rebel army defeated. The king, who had made his headquarters in one of the castles of that distant province, placed a candle in the archway over its entrance. Lighting the candle, he then announced that if all who were in rebellion against him would surrender and take an oath of loyalty while the candle was burning, they would be spared. There was clemency while the candle burned. We are living in the day of grace and mercy and in the darkness of sin and rebellion, stands the light of the Cross. And while that light shines in the darkness there is love, mercy and forgiveness for the repentant sinner. The hymn writer wrote “O the love that drew salvation’s plan- O the grace that brought it down to man. O the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary - Mercy there was great and grace was free - pardon was multiplied to me. There my burdened soul found liberty, at Calvary.” Because of the tender mercy of God, the Rising Sun came to give us salvation.” Jesus in His mercy promises a new deliverance. Finally because the Rising Sun has come there are given to us,

3. NEW POSSIBILITIES IN LIFE. LUKE 1:68, 77-79

Jesus came to men and women where they live. It was not a social visit. He came to give men and women new hope and a new direction in life. He came to set their feet on a new pathway - the narrow way which leads to life. The scriptures say in verse 79 that Rising Sun came to “shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, guide our feet in the way of peace.” He came to “shine on those who are darkness.” He is the only authentic redeeming light. The Apostle John wrote that God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all. This speaks of God’s blazing holiness. In contrast to God’s essential holy character, the scriptures declare that men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.” John 3:19. In the passage we are considering, men in sin are described as “living in darkness.” The Rising Sun, Jesus, has come to shine upon those who are living in that condition. Jesus arriving as the light of the world was part of the prophecy of Isaiah, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death the light has dawned.” Isaiah 9:2, and again he writes “Arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.” Isaiah 60:1. The Rising Sun from heaven, has invaded our world to shine upon those living in darkness...” Luke 1:78-79. He has come to point us to a new direction life.

But what is,

a. THE BASIS OF THIS NEW DIRECTION IN LIFE. Luke 1:68-69,77.

The basis or foundation for this new direction in life is redemption from the stain and clutches of sin. In v. 68, Zechariah says “He has come and redeemed His people..” The key truth here is redemption. The word redeem literally means “to buy out,” and “to release on receipt of a ransom.” It has the idea of “cost or a price paid.” When we say that Jesus died a redeeming death, we mean that He paid the price for our sin and procured deliverance for you and me, including all who put their trust in Him.

There was one special way in which a Greek slave could obtain his freedom. He could scrape and save, perhaps for years, such little sums as he was able to earn; and as he saved the money, he deposited it little by little in the temple of some god. When he had laboriously gathered his complete purchase price, he took his master to the temple where the money was deposited. There the priest paid over to the master the purchase price of freedom. The man who had been a slave became the property of the god, and therefore free of all men. But we do not have to pay the price for our freedom from sin and Satan. Jesus has already paid the price for us. Paul said, “You are not your own for you are bought with a price.” 1 Corinthians 6:20. Philip Bliss wrote in the words of that great Easter hymn. “Bearing shame and scoffing rude. In my place He stood. Sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah, What a Savior.”

Forgiveness, Redemption and Salvation are the bases for this new direction in life. Zechariah indicates that the Rising Sun has come to us

from heaven for a reason. He talks about

b. THE PURPOSE OF THIS NEW DIRECTION IN LIFE. Luke 1:74-75

Zechariah sums up this purpose in verses 74-75. **He came to “enable us to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.”** The focus of our redemption or of our salvation is to live the life of righteousness and holiness before Him all of our lives. Paul in effect says this in Romans 6:22. “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit or the fruit you receive leads to holiness.” Paul make clear that we are predestined to be conformed to the “likeness of God’s Son”. Romans 8:29, and in Ephesians 4:24. He urges us to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Holiness is Godlikeness and Christ likeness. You cannot divorce the life of righteousness and holiness from salvation. Paul in these passages makes quite clear that holy living is the expectation of God for our lives. Full salvation is more than forgiveness, it is holiness of heart and life. The purpose of the coming of the Christ Child to a Cross was to make us holy. The Rising Sun has come to us from heaven to rescue us from our enemies and to enable us to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness. Leonard Ravenhill who was my fathers friend, said “that the greatest miracle that God can do today is to take an unholy man out of an unholy world, and make that man holy and put him back into that unholy world and keep him holy in it.” The Rising Sun from heaven has come to do that.

Conclusion

The Sunrise came to be the Light of the World. If we follow Him, Jesus said, “will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

The Rising Sun has the promise of hope and life to all men and women.

“Among the Jews of Jerusalem, the dawn of the Day of Atonement was eagerly awaited. A watchman stood on the walls watching for the sunrise. When he saw the first rays he would shout, “Light! Light! I have seen the light.” Over two thousand years ago the dawn of salvation arrived and John declared, “the True light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” Zecharias knew it for he said “The Rising Sun” – “The Dawn” - The light from on high has dawned and visited us. That is the message of Christmas. “Light! Light! We have seen the Light.” Let us receive and follow the Light of the world and we shall have the “light of life.”

I want to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year. May God bless and use each of you this coming year to the Glory of His name and building of His Kingdom.