

**Luke 1: 67-75; "The Mercy Promised and Performed", A Sermon for  
the Christmas season, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on  
December 20th, 2009, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, is the one who uttered these words. They are a prophecy of what God would do in mercy for His people Israel, but they are words of mercy which also apply to all who believe in the promises of God. They pertain to Christ and to His forerunner John the Baptist. Now this Zacharias had received a promise from an angel, some nine months before this. He was a righteous man, and he and his wife Elizabeth were "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" it says, earlier in this chapter in verse 6. And they were old and advanced in years, but they had had no child because Elizabeth was barren. And it says in verse 8 that it was while Zacharias was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, that his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. In verse 10 it says that, "an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense," and when he saw him "he was troubled and fear fell upon him." But the angel said, "Don't be afraid Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John." "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth." And then he gave Zacharias this great prophecy of what John would be like; "He would be great in the sight of the Lord, and be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, and he would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and even turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; and he would make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Verses 16 and 17). Now you would have thought that with this amazing revelation, which he really had no reason to doubt, that Zacharias would have been jumping up and down and shouting Hallelujah! What a privileged position had been granted to him, to be the father of the forerunner of the Messiah. Could anyone ask for more? And yet we find a very curious unbelief reigning in the heart of this dear man. He has an angel standing in front of him, declaring these things to him; and yet he has the audacity to say in verse 18, "How shall I know this?" "For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel had to say to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings." You and I need to see and understand the awfulness of the sin of unbelief. Unbelief will question the very messenger of God Himself, and think themselves justified. Let me ask you, this afternoon, as we begin this message; are you a Christian who has become skeptical of the plan and purpose and work of Almighty God? You can't figure out how God can bring about great and good changes in your life, or in this nation, or in and among the nations of the world; and so for various personal reasons you will not believe that the great things that He has promised can take place. Remember; this was not an unbeliever who said these words to the angel; it was a man who was commended very highly, as "walking in all the commandments and the

ordinances of the Lord blameless." So you see, unbelief can gain quite a foothold in the heart and mind of one who is godly; even so.

Well, there was a consequence to this unbelief of Zacharias'. There was a disciplinary action which was brought against him by God, for his unbelief, which is given for us in verses 19 and 20. The Angel says to him, "I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God., and I was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings." "But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." And so it came to pass. I do not want to frighten you this afternoon, but there are also consequences which will come to us as believers in Jesus Christ, if we fall into skeptical unbelief of this same kind that Zacharias had. It is not for us to question the words of revelation which are given to us in the Bible. Ours is to believe and to marvel. If we do not; how will we ever be able to praise Him for the good things that He does for us by His grace, day by day, if we have this kind of attitude? How can we even begin to speak to others about Him, and about the power of the gospel, if we ourselves have a skeptical unbelieving attitude towards His purpose and His work toward ourselves? Will we not be found guilty of dishonoring the One whom we profess to love and serve? Certainly God will find ways to wake us up from this kind of sin. Yes; the Bible plainly says that "whatever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14: 23) So, you see; it is incumbent upon us who do want to glorify God in the way that we think and live, that whatever mercy God promises through Jesus Christ our Lord; He will also perform it. It says in Romans 4, verse 20, that "Abraham did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." In both Abraham's case, and in Zacharias' case, it was God's sheer mercy which gave them children who were directly related to God's fulfillment of all of His promises in Christ. Jesus Christ is God's mercy, promised and performed, not only to Abraham and the fathers, but also to us who believe in Him now as well. We want to see this and believe it this afternoon; how it is that Christ is described for us here as the mercy of God. Christ is God's mercy to Israel and to us, in the following two ways. 1st - He is the visiting mercy promised to Israel. (Verse 68) And 2nd - He is the redeeming mercy promised to the fathers and performed in remembrance of His Covenant with Abraham. (Verses 69-75)

**1st - Christ is God's mercy to Israel and to us Gentiles in that He is Visiting Mercy.** (Verse 68)

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited His people." To visit means to come to the place where someone else lives; to spend some time with them and then to leave again. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ did in His incarnation. He who had existed from all eternity came down to visit men in the person of His Son. Turn with me to John Chapter 1. Look at verse 1. "In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "He was in the Beginning with God." "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing

was made that was made." These are obvious and self-evident truths that ought not to be twisted. If you have clear spiritual sight; having been given that sight by the illumination of your mind and heart by the Holy Spirit, you ought to be able to see and receive and hold to this truth; that this Essential Word of God; this Logos, existed from all eternity with God. He was "brought forth" or begotten; like begetting like; God begetting His own Word in eternity past; before the foundation of the world. God spoke with Himself and to Himself in Divine Decrees and brought forth from Himself in His own substance and essence in the Divine Godhead; His Son, His only Begotten Son. For this Word that is spoken of here in John 1 was already there with God, and He was God, in the Beginning, when all things were created by Him, for Him, and through Him as the Second Person of the Divine Trinity. It was not human flesh that was begotten before the foundation of the World. And it was not that the Father has a body of flesh and bones and brought forth one like Himself physically, as the Mormons have so erroneously asserted. It is that God is spirit; and what God the Father brought forth in eternity past was the One; the Only-begotten One who would be His very Word. This was a begetting in a spiritual and eternal sense. Verse 18 says, "No one has seen God at any time." "The only begotten Son (or God) who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (Or revealed Him) This eternal begetting of the Word would form the real spiritual basis of Christ's taking upon Himself flesh and coming to visit us. It would be the basis of His becoming man as well as being God, in time and space; in the fullness of time; the only Mediator between God and men would visit us.

Now look down now at verse 14. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." There it is; the Logos, the Word, was begotten of the Father in eternity past as the One who, being of His own substance and essence as God, would become flesh. And He, being God, would become something that He had not been, from all eternity. He would become a man; He would take upon Himself human nature. He would be one person with two natures; the divine and the human. He, in His human nature, would be created and formed by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. In this way, He would come down to visit us, and live among us, as a man among men. He would come into this world as a little baby, as a little child. He would live in a way that would show us the way of truth and righteousness. He would visit us in mercy because He saw our plight in sin; that we would perish forever if He did not come. Blessed is the Lord God of Israel who has visited His people."

**2ndly - Christ is the Redeeming mercy of God promised to the fathers and to us.** (Verses 69-75)

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us...." Verse 70 - "As God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us." "To perform the mercy promised to our father and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham...." The purpose of the Lord's visit is here revealed. It

is not just to come down and look and see if the report is bad concerning us. He knew that the report was bad. He knows what our sins deserve. This is why the prophets had to prophesy "since the world began" that we should be saved from our enemies. It is because we cannot be saved, by our own efforts from our spiritual enemies. We needed a Redeemer. God's promises have been since the world began. For our enemies have been since the world began. It was Satan, that great spiritual enemy of God and man who came into the garden of Eden in the Beginning of the world and deceived Eve, and through her deceived Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And Adam and Eve fell from their original righteousness and all persons descended from them fell in them. What a desperate condition all men have been in since the Fall. But God in love saw that we could not save ourselves. And so He purposed from the Beginning of the world to give promises, promises that we would be delivered from our enemies. Our greatest enemies are Satan and ourselves clinging to the hope that we can justify ourselves holding on to our sin.

But thanks be to God that He has raised up a horn of salvation for us. He has raised up Jesus Christ our Lord to be our horn. The horn of salvation is a powerful word picture of His charging at our spiritual enemies to gore them spiritually, to push them back, to scatter them, and to defeat them. There is a wonderful word picture given to us of Christ in the prophetic blessing of Moses upon the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 33: 13-17 which ties in with this. It speaks of the literal Joseph who was faithful to God in his generation. But it speaks even more to us today of the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Blessed of the Lord is his land, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, and deep lying beneath, with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months, with the best things of ancient mountains, with the precious things of the everlasting hills, with the precious things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush." "Let the blessing come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers." "His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns like the horns of the wild ox; together with them He shall push the people to the ends of the earth." "They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh." These blessings may most certainly be applied to Joseph and to his believing descendants in Israel, but they may also be applied to Christ who by His being born into the world and his faithfulness in life and death purchased the precious things of heaven; the dew of grace, the precious fruits of righteousness, the best things of the ancient mountains of God's decrees and purposes and promises. Christ's land is the inheritance for His people which He purchased with His sufferings. We who believe in Jesus Christ dwell in Immanuel's land. These blessings of salvation have most certainly come upon the head of the Lord Jesus, on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brethren. He was holy, harmless and undefiled, and separate from sinners. But having not only come to visit, but also purposing to become our Redeemer, His way of conquering was to be gored by His enemies at the cross. It was some of the descendants of Ephraim and

Manasseh who pushed Him to the cross, but He went there so that many of them would be saved. He pushed back at them with the horns of His righteous and His willingness to suffer for sinners. And He prevailed in the sight of God. Sinful men everywhere who will now repent; will together with Christ the greater Joseph, push the peoples to the ends of the earth. That is; that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; the truth of what He came to do and to bring in salvation shall push forward to strive against the sinful hearts of men to the ends of the earth. It will push forward into their hearts and conquer many because of God's mercy in sending Him. Jesus Christ is the greater Joseph of this prophecy. And so we see that sometimes even the greatest enemies of Christ and the gospel are saved to become His greatest friends and promoters of the truth of what He came to bring to men.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was born into this fallen and sinful world, His arch-enemy Satan tried to destroy Him at Bethlehem through King Herod. Herod thought that the Lord Jesus was a rival king, and since he craved to have all the power to himself, he would put to death any rival to his kingdom. When he heard the words of the Magi, who had come from afar to worship Jesus; asking where the prophecies of God's word had said He would be born; the leaders of the Jews told him that it was in Bethlehem. And so Herod had all the male children from the age of two years old and under put to death. "This is awful," you say. Yes, it most certainly was; but it is a good picture of fallen human nature. We, by nature, do not want anyone to rule over our heart but ourselves. Our sinful heart will tell us that Christ's being born there will be a threat to our ruling ourselves; a threat to our freedom and the sovereignty which we think that we have over our lives. But it is a strong lie and a deception which resides in our own bosom. The truth is, that unless Christ was born in Bethlehem and grew up to become the horn of our salvation; there would be no hope and no eternal salvation for any person at all. The truth is; that unless Christ is born in our heart, that we will perish forever in the lake of eternal fire.

Christ came into this world to die for all of God's enemies and ours. Listen to Psalm 92, verses 5 and following. "O Lord, how great are Your works! "Your thoughts are very deep." "A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this." "When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever." "But You, Lord, are on high forevermore, for behold Your enemies, O Lord, for behold Your enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered." "But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil." All this destruction of God's enemies was accomplished by Christ's coming into this world to be the Righteous One who would fulfill God's law and to suffer as a sacrifice for our sins at the cross. Listen to Psalm 89, verse 19 and following. "Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one, and said,: 'I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from among the people, I have found My servant David (the prophecy applies to David but also to Christ descended from David), I have anointed him, with whom My hand shall be established; also My arm shall strengthen him, the enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him." "I will beat down his foes before

his face and plague those who hate him." But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted." That is; not only David's power and kingdom would be exalted in an earthly sense, but that the greater David's eternal kingdom and power and glory would be established forever, and all of God's enemies defeated forever. David himself confesses in 2 Samuel 22, verse 2, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Savior, You save me from violence, I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies. Is this the way that you view the Lord Jesus Christ this afternoon? Is He your strength and your Redeemer? Has He visited your heart with salvation? Then you can serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all your days for you will be saved from all of your enemies. Let us bless the Lord, with Zacharias this afternoon, that because God sent Christ, we will be saved from all of our enemies. He has performed the mercy that He has promised to everyone who will believe.