

Second Sunday after Christmas; January 5, 2025  
+ Luke 1:68-79 +  
“God is Worth Believing”

**His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:**

**Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has visited us and prepared redemption for his people.  
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,  
just as he said long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets.  
He raised up salvation from our enemies from the hand of all who hate us,  
in order to show mercy to our fathers by remembering his holy covenant,  
the oath which he swore to Abraham our father,  
to grant deliverance to us from the hand of our enemies,  
so that we are able to serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High,  
because you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of God's tender mercies,  
by which the Rising Sun from on high will visit us,  
to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

I promise that I will work all things in the world for the eternal good of my people. That's right: murder, persecution, abuse and abandonment – all of it! I hate sin, but I will somehow (and you'll never know how) use it for the good of my Church, and for each of its individual members.

I promise that when you face me on Judgment Day, I will not call you to account for the worst thing you did in your life – that thing you can't stop bringing up in your own heart, I will not raise. And, by the way, the good things you struggle to give yourself credit for, I will remember and reward on that day. I will also do for you on that Day what you have never seen before with your own eyes: I will raise your dead body up out of the ground, the urn, or wherever you happen to be.

I will also give your life meaning – even on the hardest days, when the snow's deepest and the steps steepest, when nothing you do seems to matter – every day, I will prepare good works for you to do to serve me and your neighbor. And I will rejoice in them, even if no one else does.

I promise that even while you hear of your brother and sister Christians being persecuted in far away lands like Egypt and Syria, and you hear about Christians in your own land falling away from me at staggering rates, I will keep working through water, Word, bread and wine, to preserve me Church until the end.

I promise that when no one else listens to you, I will. When everyone else is tired of your voice, I will delight in it. And whatever you ask for in my name, according to my will, will be yours. That means I'll always give you what's best.

I promise to reunite you with those Christians you have to say goodbye to at funerals. I promise to wipe those tears away from your eyes forever.

I promise you will one day never feel pain again. Or hunger or sadness, for that matter.

I promise that, until you reach that heavenly home, there will be no temptation to sin against me that you cannot overpower. Your Enemy can come at you; I'll let him do that to test you. But you can beat him and overcome that temptation every single time.

The "I" beginning all of those statements is, of course, God. And the promise that follows in each statement is a promise that God makes to you and all Christians in his Word. Now, if you will permit a personal question: which of those promises of God do you doubt? Maybe a more useful question: which do you doubt the most? That is the more useful question, because if anyone here would like to claim perfect trust in any of those promises...well, we'll know who the liars are. We all doubt all of those promises at least a little, at least sometimes. The only difference between us is which promises we doubt the most and the most often.

God wants your confidence in all of his promises to grow stronger, and today he feeds you with one divine fact that will cause this growth of your faith in everything he says will happen.

In the lesson you heard from Genesis chapter 17, God was repeating a promise to Abraham. It was a promise of three parts: you will be the father of a great nation; your descendants will possess the land in which you now live, and all nations will be blessed through you. It took God a long time to keep the first two parts of that promise; but it took him the longest to keep the third. That promise to bless the whole world through Abraham's family was kept, as you heard in the Second Lesson, as God sent his Son when the time had fully come.

Yes, it took a long time, but at the right time, God sent his Son. Born holy, the Son of God, and born human, to step under God's law in our place, who have sinned under that law. In our place, under God's commands, Jesus kept God's demand of holiness. In him – through faith in him – God adopts us as his sons – his heirs who will receive the treasure of heaven.

God made a promise to save us in his Son. He made it to Abraham, repeated it through the prophets, and kept it on Christmas. And Jesus did everything – a perfect life under the law of God, the perfect sacrifice to remove the curse of sin – to make us God's children and heirs. It is the biggest the best promise God ever made. And he kept it.

Now, Scripture does often argue from greater to lesser when it comes to God's promises: if he kept that biggest one, you can count on him to keep them all! And we could go that route. But that's not the tune Zechariah sings in the Gospel. It's not greater-to-lesser; it's because, because, because.

God will keep every promise he makes you because he kept the promise to make his eternal child in Christ. Zechariah does start by singing salvation praise to the Lord. He, too, recalls the way God promised over and over to save us in his Son: **Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited us and prepared redemption for his people** ["redeem" is also the picture Paul used – to buy back from sin and death and Satan's power]. **He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, just as he said long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets. He raised up salvation for us...the oath he swore to Abraham our father.** Promise of salvation made and made and made – including to Abraham – and finally, now kept! Speaking to his son John the Baptist, Zechariah sings: **And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, because you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.** John the Baptist

stands on the bridge between the Old Testament, where the promise of salvation is made, and the New, where Christ comes and keeps it.

And it's because of that one promise made and kept that every promise God makes is always kept.

God promises to work all things for the eternal good of his Christian Church. God does not promise to work all things for the eternal good of his Church because he enjoys a challenge or likes working on puzzles. He does it because we have been redeemed and saved by the work of Jesus Christ. Through faith in him we are now God's saints, his own holy children, and that is a matter God treats intimately. When you are his own, he loves you so much that he makes the worst work for your best. He keeps that promise because of the salvation promise.

And why will he keep the promise not to condemn you for your sin? Because he is soft on sin, and doesn't really care about it too much? No! Listen to Zechariah sing: **you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of God's tender mercies, by which the Rising Sun from on high will visit us.** Your sin will be gone when you stand before God, because they are forgiven in Christ. They will be gone, because God in tender mercy toward you, sent his S-o-n to rise as the S-u-n on this world and visit us, to take those sins on himself and pay for them. He keeps the promise not to condemn because he kept the promise to save you in Christ.

And why does God lay out good works for you to do each day? Why will he remember them and commend them on the Last Day? Because he's easily pleased? Because any sinner can work for him and please him? Oh, no! **He raised up salvation...so that we are able to serve him without feat, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.** God kept the promise to make you holy in Jesus Christ. And in that promise kept he keeps the promise to accept and delight in your service to him.

Why does God preserve his Church against every persecution, and strengthen you to overcome temptation? The Church's shield is the living Christ, and so is your power to stick a thumb Satan's eye when he comes prowling around. **He has raised up salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to grant deliverance to us from the hand of our enemies.** Jesus' salvation is the reason the Church will live and thrive through eternity; he is our power over the Devil's power.

Jesus is also the reason that God will keep his Word and raise his people from dust and ashes. He is the Way, and guides all who trust in him come to the Father for eternity. He will show our bodies the way out of the graves to eternal peace because he rose first. After the shadow of death overtakes us, the Rising Sun will raise us to eternal peace: **...the Rising Sun from on high will visit us, to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

Christ is the key to every divine promise. Each and every one rests on him. In the salvation promise, kept in Christ, all of God's promises are kept. Listen to them all. And believe them just as surely as you believe that Jesus came into the world on Christmas and took your sins away. In his salvation, every promise is sure. Amen.