

Sermon: Christmas Eve

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-2, 19-27; Acts 13: 16-26; Luk 1:67-79

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With Christmas we think of peace, we sing of peace, we dream of peace. But look at us! Look at this world.

The world we live in is a dark place. Hundred meters from here, tanks that are meant for fighting wars with foreign enemies to protect the nation, are now pointing at the people of Egypt for protecting the president. The nation is divided. The people are afraid. What will the future be for us here in Egypt?

In our own personal lives we also suffer from darkness. I know it is a national sports here to blame the palace for all things that go wrong, but do we not suffer much more from those matters that have nothing to do with politics?

Relationships go wrong. We fight at work. People get awful diseases. Friends die too young. And we have so many dark corners in our hearts and minds, that we use many methods to keep people away from what is going on in ourselves; because we do not like to show our darkness to other people.

God came to us

But with Christmas we do not focus on this darkness we all suffer from – we look at the light! In the midst of our darkness, God has come to us. Zechariah, a priest in the temple of God and the father of John the Baptist, speaks of this light that has come to us. He speaks of Jesus as

...the rising sun who will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death. (Luke 1:78b-79)

If we live in darkness because of what goes on in our lives, If we live and in the shadow of death – the tanks outside the gates show us what that means – God is offering hope, because of his tender mercy.

God is reaching out from heaven. Jesus was not just a normal baby – he was a heavenly child, the Son of God.

The Jews who heard this prayer of Zachariah, and who later read it in the Gospel account of St Luke, may have also remembered the words of the old Jewish prophet Malachi. In Mal 4:2 the prophet said:

For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, with healing in its wings, and you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

Young calves and other animals, when having been caged in darkness for too long, can jump so joyfully through the grass when they are released. That shows something of the joy God gives to those to whom He come to save.

To rescue us from our enemies

Zachariah summarizes all the promises of God in the Old Testament. He says in Luke 1:74-75 that our Lord Jesus came...

to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness
before him
all our days.

Israel was living in a time with real enemies. The armies of Rome occupied the land and the people were treated badly by the rulers. In our days, not much is new...

Even until now, we still suffer under regimes that mistreat the people and especially the people of God.

The real rescue is not that God puts us straight into paradise after the coming of Jesus... the real rescue is, that he enables us to serve him without fear. Without fear, that is the most important matter for us.

Fear is a worse enemy than whatever bad regime may rule. Because fear makes our hearts and our minds unable to look up to God and to live a life of joy. Fear makes darkness rule our minds and hearts. If we fear, then the forces of darkness have won.

The coming of Jesus has liberated us from fear. He has shown us the heart of God – a heart full of love for us. And he has shown that he is more powerful than death. He is the King of all rulers. And he has opened the gates of paradise for us.

In the face of the political situation in Egypt, let us be fearless. Let us follow our own Lord Jesus Christ. He came as a vulnerable baby to a world full of dangers, and in the midst of that and through all problems, he was not beaten by fear.

In the face of our darkness – Jesus Christ rules. He came for the forgiveness of your sins, He made your life good with God, and He stands beside you for your defence.

Jesus Christ came to rescue us from our enemies, not by taken those enemies away from us – but by making us fearless.

But this was not a goal in itself. Salvation is not meant to make us sit back and relax. It is to enable us to serve God. That is what Christmas is about. God coming to our world to bring light in our darkness, so that our lives would be changed for serving him.

Zachariah, in his prayer, explains this 'serving' a bit further. He points in Luke 1:75 to how we have to serve God. That is,

In holiness and righteousness,
before him,
all our days.

Holy means, set apart for God. Separated from evil. It means being different from the president's battle tanks and the power play that is going on, and living in this world as a follower Jesus Christ. We do not participate in these games of power and hatred.

We want to serve God in righteousness, that is, we want to do what is right in regard to all people. The baby Jesus gives us the example. The Son of God left his glory for our benefit, and he did not mind to become weak and humble for this reason. May our lives be focussed in the first place on the welfare of each and every individual we meet – that is the best guarantee for our own joy.

This we can only do with the help of God. The only way to serve him in holiness and righteousness is if we are 'before him all our days', as Zachariah says.

Being before God means to relate to him face to face. Jesus Christ has made it possible that we relate in such a way with God. He opened the doors of heaven and invites us to be with God, to pray to him, to live with him. In deep communion with God, we are enabled to be holy and righteousness in the midst of our present darkness.

Let us be people who are 'before him all our days'. It is certainly my own goal to spend more time in prayer and with God and his word in the year ahead of us, and I hope to be able to take you along in this.

The Christmas child came for our rescue. To make us fearless in our service to God. He wants our holiness and righteousness. That we live for God and for other people.

And we can only do so if we live in a relationship of love and prayer with God all of our days.

To guide our feet into the path of peace

The last words of the prayer of Zachariah describe this in a beautiful manner. He speaks of Jesus Christ as...

...the rising sun who 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 (Luke 1:78b-79)

This is the will of God for us... to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Jesus is the one who lightens our path, if we live close to him and his word. He shows us where to go, how to live. And that is summarized by this one word: peace.

Actually, by the path of peace. It is a road we are on. Peace is not just a sentimental Christmas feeling, feeling good, it is above all a lifestyle.

If we fear and hate and damage other people, we live like our enemies and then our enemies have certainly beaten us. The only acceptable answer to evil is goodness. The only answer to violence is peace.

It is the lifestyle of the Christmas child. Of a baby in a manger while Roman armies crush the people. Of Jesus the preacher who lived and spoke the truth and who always defended people. And it is the lifestyle of the one who allowed himself to be crucified for the sake of creating peace between God and his people.

Christmas is above all the time of peace. Maybe not always of feeling peace, but certainly of doing peace.

Even for people who want to follow Jesus Christ, relationships can still go wrong.

And we still have our fights. And I have not seen statistics that Christians live longer than non-Christians – we all get diseases, we all die, and sometimes sadly young.

And we still have so many dark corners in our hearts and minds, and we find it hard to let other people look into this.

But there is one thing Christians cannot avoid. Because we believe in the one who shines light in our world and into our life, we cannot avoid change. We are pushed forward by him to walk on that way of peace, on the way of serving God in holiness and righteousness. His light shows us our darkness, and it helps us to move more toward Him and his lifestyle.

Let us this Christmas, and with a focus on the year ahead of us, strongly resolve to serve Him, to serve our families and friends, to love him all of our days, and to walk the way of peace, to be peacemakers in this time when that is so needed.

May God bless you; merry Christmas!