

Expectations for the Future

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Advent

Sermon Text: Luke 1:67-79



⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, ⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father

Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

We all look to the future with hope. We expect something from life. We want to find a place where we can live safely. We want to find a job. We want to learn a trade or study something. We also have these expectations for our children. We expect that our children should make something of themselves. Some expectations will be fulfilled. Some expectations will be unfulfilled. Today I will introduce to you two people from the Bible who had such expectations: The priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Both came from pious families and believed in God. But they had a problem. They couldn't have children. At that time, it was thought that childlessness was a punishment from God. People thought that God had turned away from Zechariah and Elizabeth because they had no children. Maybe even both of them felt that God had turned His back on them. That's why they both prayed to God all the more. And they didn't understand why their prayers were not answered and why God had simply abandoned them. Eventually they became very old and still had no children. Then something amazing happened. An angel appeared to the old man, Zechariah, in the Temple and told him that his wife would have a son. Zechariah couldn't believe it. He couldn't believe that he could have children with his old wife. And even if it was an angel that said this to him, he couldn't believe it. But because he couldn't believe it, his voice was taken away.

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth is old. And yet we can still empathize with their feelings to this day. When God doesn't answer our prayers and when we are disappointed, we feel just like Zechariah and Elizabeth. We can't feel God in our hearts, much less see God. And sometimes we think that God has turned His back on us because we experience one misfortune after another. Zechariah and Elizabeth also knew about misfortune. They felt abandoned by God not only in their private lives but also in major political affairs. That's why Zechariah speaks about people who hate him and about

powerful enemies who are against them in his prayer. We also know that feeling when overwhelming forces rule over us and our lives. For example, this can be in the form of a paper from the government that you may not stay in Germany and therefore must return to your country where you may have to go to prison. However, the greatest enemies that we have are not political powers. The greatest enemies are within ourselves. Sometimes fear and doubt shatter our faith like strong waves. We would really like to see more of God's power in our lives, but we can't see or feel God. Fear and doubt are often much closer to our hearts than faith in God. And so, our faith in God is crushed under the waves of fear. Zechariah was a priest. Thus, a man of God. And he prayed every day. And yet Zechariah also had these doubts. Even when an angel told him directly about God's plan, he couldn't even believe an angel.

How are you feeling during these days before Christmas? What do you expect for Christmas? What do you wish for? Oh, there are so many wishes that we could have here! How nice it would be if all at once the Corona virus were defeated! How nice it would be if war all over the world came to an end. How nice it would be if we could live in peace with each other again. I know that many of the wishes we humans have can't come to fruition. But some do. And when that happens, then it can happen that heaven is opened to us and we feel and taste the nearness of God.

That is exactly what happened to the priest Zechariah. After his meeting with the angel in the Temple, he couldn't speak anymore. He bore this punishment in silence. Perhaps he felt abandoned by God again. But then when his wife became pregnant, he must have recognized that God doesn't lie and He would fulfill His will. And yet he was silent. Only much later when the child was already born and he was to receive his name, Zechariah was filled with a certainty that didn't come from himself, but from the Holy Spirit. In large letters, he wrote the name of his son on a writing tablet: "JOHN." This name can be translated as "God's grace." The old priest Zechariah could not only feel the joy about his son, but heaven was opened to him and he saw much more than just the little newborn John. He saw God. He not only saw God, Who had blessed him and his wife with a son, but he saw the whole of world history before him. And everything would be achieved through a different child. The moment Zechariah saw all of this, he knew that God gave him more than just a son. God wants more! God doesn't just want to give us only beautiful things, or health, or a long life. It's also not so important which wishes are fulfilled and which wishes are not. But it is important that God gives us Himself. God is close to us; God loves us and wants only the best for us. The moment Zechariah saw all of this, he began to sing. And his song is not so much about the son he and Elizabeth miraculously received. His song is only about God. And what this God would do through His Son Jesus. In that moment, when he saw the great works of God, all doubt and fear disappeared. Dear congregation: It is human not believe in God. Zechariah also doubted God. But is it important that we can see and feel God? Wouldn't it be much more important that He sees us! That He knows about us. It's much more important that God not only knows about us but also has good things planned for us. Zechariah may see that God not only thinks good things about us, but also does good things for us! God doesn't just send us a Christmas card or think about us. He comes Himself. Jesus Christ became a man like us. And He personally steps into your house and wants to be with you. In Zechariah's hymn of praise, this path of God to us humans can be summed up in one word: that is "mercy." Mercy is something that you feel deep in your heart. But here, Zechariah doesn't talk about a human heart, but about God's heart. One can say: We can't feel God in our hearts. But He feels us in His heart! We can't see God, much less feel Him. But God feels and sees us! And He has compassion on us. And Jesus shows us how God does that. Jesus didn't just love from afar. He came into the arms of Mary and Joseph. Later, He entered the houses of tax collectors or the sick. Jesus showed us how much God

loves us. Again and again it is said of Jesus: "He had compassion!" Sometimes Jesus even wept with us! And that is grace. I don't know which wishes will be fulfilled for us in this year. I also don't know which wishes will be unfulfilled. But one thing I wish for over everything else: That is, that we can see heaven open and see this God who sees us. He doesn't just see us. He is also merciful to us. And that means that He is always with you. Amen.