

## 2008 ADVENT ZECHARIAH- HOPE OF A SAVIOR

Luke 1:5-25

On this first Sunday in Advent  
it is appropriate that our first word is HOPE.

In 1929 there was a group of ministers at Boston School of Theology,  
Who gathered to discuss how they should conduct Thanksgiving services.  
Things were about as bad as they could get, with no sign of relief.  
The bread lines were depressingly long,  
the stock market had plummeted,  
the term Great Depression which described the mood of the country  
was just coming into being.

The pastors thought in deference to the human misery all about them  
They would only lightly mentioning the subject Thanksgiving  
Dr. William L. Stiger, said: "This is not the time to give mere passing mention to  
Thanksgiving and hope, just the opposite.  
This is the time for the nation to get matters in perspective  
and thank God for blessings that are always present,  
but sometimes overlooked due to intense hardship."

I think the word **HOPE** has taken a bum rap in secular society  
It has more to do with "wishing" than "expecting."  
In the face of setbacks, unemployment, bankruptcy, divorce,  
sickness, even death.

How many times has a pastor said:  
"Don't give up, it will work, out God provides."  
And the people reply: "I **HOPE** so!" almost with a sarcastic  
"Sure it will!"

You remember Lucy's encouragement to Charlie Brown in one of the Peanuts cartoons.  
"Look at it this way, Charlie Brown," she consoles. "These are your bitter days. These are  
the days of your hardship and struggle but if you just hold your head up high and keep on  
fighting, you'll triumph!" Charlie says: "Gee, do you really think so, Lucy?" As he walks  
away Lucy says: "Frankly, no!"<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament's understanding of the word **HOPE**  
Was a strong powerful protective word.  
To the **Thessalonians** Paul writes about hope.  
Put on the "**HOPE** of salvation as a helmet".  
To the Colossians he writes of the  
"**HOPE** laid up in heaven,"  
the "**HOPE** of glory."

Apostle Peter, in his first letter writes

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great  
mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of  
Jesus Christ from the dead, I Peter 1:3-5NAS**

A living hope is one that is not static,  
But is renewed every day  
Like his mercy and like his grace,  
Through the Resurrection of the Living Christ.

Don't give up, friends.  
 No matter how tough it gets  
 How dark it seems.  
 We all go thru the valleys,  
 But this promises that we don't go alone.

### **Look at Romans 5:**

We have a hope in God that does not disappoint us.

**We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces HOPE, and HOPE does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given us. (Romans 5:2-5).**

The reason the word hope has lost its muscle today,  
 Is that we have disconnected hope from God.  
 God puts the power back in hope.  
 A "**HOPE** that does not disappoint us"

Again, it's Lucy who has planned a picnic for the next day. She says to Charlie Brown, "I just **HOPE** to goodness that it doesn't rain ..." Walking away, Charlie answers, "Hoping to goodness is not theologically sound."6 Charlie's right. "Hoping to goodness" is not sound. Fixing our **HOPE** upon God is.

In our scripture we find

### **I. A NATION IN NEED OF HOPE.**

**The cause of their hopelessness was external.**

We see it in the first part of vs 5.

**<sup>5</sup>In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Luke 1:5**

The first eight words of this scripture describe the reason for their despair  
 There was great depression in the land.  
 The new king was Herod,  
 Surnamed the *Great*, the son of *Antipater*,  
 He was an Idumean by birth,  
 Now Herod had professed himself to be a proselyte to the Jewish religion,  
 But that was simply so he could get appointed and elected to the Jerusalem area.  
 He was an agnostic,  
 He made mockery of the Jewish faith.  
 and promoted his secular interests and ambition of society  
 solely for his own political gain.

The despair came because for the first time the throne of Judah  
 was filled by a person not of Jewish extraction,  
 forced upon the people by the Roman government.  
 An anti Jew  
 An anti Christ we will later learn.  
 Who was taxing and persecuting them  
 Soon would be killing them.

But the people of Israel didn't give up.  
Because they knew the prophecy,

**The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. Genesis 49:10**

That this new governor would come from Bethlehem  
Who would rule and feed the people of Israel.

**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Micah 5:2**

Out of the smallest clan of Judah comes the Savior.  
Out of the most unsuspecting place comes the voice of hope.  
So it is the same to us today?

Don't give up,  
Because Hope can come for you in a moment,  
From places you never dream.  
When your hope is in a Living God.  
In our scripture we find

#### **I. A NATION IN NEED OF HOPE.**

Secondly you see

#### **II. A PEOPLE IN NEED OF HOPE.**

**The cause of Zechariah and Elizabeth HOPELESSNESS was personal**

**But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. Luke 1:7**

#### **How many times can we cope with the external failures**

**Of losing a job,**

Having to move,

Hitting a deer and causing one extra financial disasters.

Having a child in rebellion

Flunking a test or missing an interview.

Discovering a skin cancer.

But what gets us is the **internal breakdown of hope.**

When we get overtired?

And we are overworked?

The Adrenal has done all it can do to keep us going

And we crash.

Nightmares begin,

Sleepless nights,

And drug filled days,

Because we are on edge or over the edge

Zechariah and Elizabeth were from families of priests.

**<sup>5</sup>In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Luke 1:5**

Both were descendents of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

And just because they were born preacher kids

Didn't make it any easier on them.  
 But they were faithful,  
 Scripture says they were upright in the sight of God.  
**“Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. Luke 1:6**  
 They lived what they believed.  
 Knowing that God was their Maker,  
 Who watched over all their conduct and examined all their motives.

But even when we are living right,  
 When we're walking right,  
 Things don't go the way we might expect.  
 Disappointment and broken dreams can be still with us.  
**And there was a dark cloud over their lives.**  
**But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. Luke 1:7**

**Another translation says:**  
**They were Stricken in years: ASV**  
 The Golden years can strike us in ways not so blessed.  
 I was up to the nursing home the other day  
 And I saw the reality of the golden years.  
 Bone that are brittle and broken,  
 Minds that are weak and forgetful  
 Kidney and organs that no longer function  
 Bodies that can't fight off the infections.

Somehow by the permission of God, *sterility* and *old age*  
 both met in the person of *Elisabeth*,  
 Childbearing was impossible.  
 Do we hear an echo from *Sarah* and *Abraham*, Genesis 11:30; 17:17.  
**But in the economy of God all things can work together for good**  
**To those who have been called according to his purpose: Roman 8:28**

God understood that if John the Baptist was to be the forerunner of Christ;  
 his birth, like that of Isaac, must be miraculous,  
 as a representative of the birth of Christ that was to come.  
 But all those years, nobody told Zechariah and Elizabeth.

**That's why I say to you “don't despair”**  
 God knows what's coming for you.  
 So let the living hope  
 of a living God  
 Have a living chance in your life.

Zechariah and Elizabeth did what we must do.  
 They remained faithful to God.  
 They remained faithful to one another.  
 Hopelessness, crises, disappointment  
 Are all words that I hear in divorce and separation.  
 They could have split up.  
 But they didn't give up.

Most of our problems come when we leave  
God out of the equation.

Zechariah went to the temple.  
He maintained his righteousness  
He stayed at his job.

**<sup>10</sup>And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Luke 1:10**

In the midst of worship.  
In the midst of duty.  
God sent his angel.

**<sup>11</sup>Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.**

**<sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. Luke 1:11-13**

It was in the temple  
In a place of worship  
That God meet him.  
The Angel appeared  
And hope was born into reality.

It is here for us this morning,  
In this place of worship  
That God will meet you.  
And angels will speak  
And hope will be born into reality.  
Where the people are praying,  
The results of our lives are changed forever  
Remember that God does not reminisce the past.  
He never looks back to the good old days,  
He only and ever looks forward to the better days to come.

**Angel said:**

**<sup>14</sup>He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord... Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. Luke 1:14,16**

**Do you have a living hope in a living God?**

**The air terminal was a sea of people, hurrying and pushing.**

But one night it was especially crowded since a snow storm snarled the schedules of arriving and departing airplanes.

In the midst of the terminal, all by herself, sat a little traveler,  
a little girl who could not have been more than a first grader in school,  
six years old, maybe seven. She sat quietly.

One might have expected tears, but her big eyes never closed.

Wide-eyed she watched. Now and again she smiled.

A security guard spoke to her softly, asking if he might be of help.

"No," she answered, "I'm waiting for my daddy."

Snow fell in increasing depths  
She waited for more than an hour.  
Finally there was a huge smile as she recognized  
a snow-covered man coming toward her.  
"See," she said, "I told you he would come."  
There never had been a doubt.  
Never did her **HOPE** falter.  
She knew him in whom her **HOPE** was fixed.  
She believed in her fathers love,  
Her father integrity,  
She knew no storm would keep him Daddy from meeting her.  
God is your father,  
And his promise is the same yesterday today and forever.

You have no idea  
What you being here does to your psyche,  
Your state of mind,  
Your healing and health,  
Your future  
Your relationships,

God is a living hope in our 'midst.  
Do not fear what the world can do to you.  
Do not listen to the financial naysayer  
For in the midst of it,  
God will bring to you.  
A new depth of Glory and Understanding.

Every prayer is heard.  
Every tear is registered in heaven,  
In the best of times and in the worst of times,  
God will answer in his most effective way.

Because we have a living hope that will not disappoint us.  
Hope is not optimism, that something will turn out well,  
Hope is the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.  
Will you wait on the lord today?  
**And trust him and live accordingly?**