**JESUS, THE RISING SUN (The Song of Zechariah)** December 30, 2012

Luke 1:57-80 / Key verse1:78,79, “Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Today is the last Sunday worship service in 2012. We thank and praise God for having been faithfully with us and loved us for this one year in spite of our many ups and downs. Although Christmas is already passed, today we want to study another Christmas passage. It is about John the Baptist’s father Zechariah’s song. Zechariah in his old age got a miracle baby John and through this event, he was envisioned the Messiah’s coming. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and sang today’s song. In today’s song, Zechariah mainly introduced Jesus in two names: a horn of salvation and the rising sun. So let’s think about these two name’s meaning to us.

**I. God’s hand was with John (57-66)**

Look at verses 57-63. Zechariah’s wife Elizabeth gave birth to a son in her old age. It was a miracle baby. Actually every baby is a miracle because it is absolute gift that only God can give us. However, Zechariah and Elizabeth’s baby was more miracle baby because they got a baby in their old age, which was impossible in human way. Obviously it was God’s special work and God had special plan for the baby. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared joy. On the eighth day, according to Jewish custom they came to circumcise the child. Here circumcision is the dedication ceremony to God. Jewish parents dedicated their child to God through circumcision. And at this historic time, usually Jewish parents named their child following their parent’s name. So Zechariah’s relatives were going to name him after his father Zechariah. But to the surprise, his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” It was the name the angel Gabriel gave to Zechariah for his son. They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”

So finally they made signs to his father to find out what he would like to name the child. Since the father Zechariah couldn’t speak for 10 months as God’s dumbness training, he asked for a writing tablet and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” These old couple co-worked very well in naming their child. And this naming their child ‘John’ had significant meaning before God. It was their act of faith and obedience toward God. They put God’s plan ahead of their own dream or wish. Like every parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth could have wished their own dream in naming their child by naming according to their heritage or human traditions. But both of them obeyed angel’s instruction by naming their child ‘John’. It meant they wanted God’s plan would be fulfilled in their child’s life. All our children are precious because they are God’ absolute gift. So we have to pray that God’s plan for them may be fulfilled in their lives.

In verse 64, when Zechariah wrote, “His name is John,” immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. When the neighbours saw this, they were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Definitely the baby born in old couple Zechariah and Elizabeth’s family was not just an ordinary baby but extraordinary baby on whom God had special plan. So look at verse 66. “Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, ‘What then is this child going to be?’ For the Lord’s hand was with him.”

**II. A horn of Salvation (67-75)**

Look at verse 67. Right after his mouth was open, what was Zechariah’s first deed? Was it complaining because of his 10 months dumbness training? No, He was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied praising God. Look at verse 68. Let’s read all together. “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.” Zechariah praised God firstly because he had come. Here what does “he has come” mean? Literally it means “God has visited”. The God of Israel; The Creator God had visited. In human history Israel was specially chosen people by God and God had visited Abraham and his descendants and dwelled among them through his angels. He spoke them through the prophets. But this time is totally different. This time God himself had visited. God became a man. He came as a tiny baby. Especially in Israel after the last prophet Malachi, for 400 years there had not been any prophets. Israel was colonized and oppressed by series of super power nations. God chose Israel as a kingdom of priest and a holy nation but Israel abandoned God. So God also seemed to abandon her too. Yet God had never abandoned Israel. In God’s time, God finally had visited Israel not just as an angel or through prophets but as himself. People will make top head line news if a space man from Mars or any other stars has visited to earth. Then how much more should we pay attention to Jesus because he is Creator God who made you and I and he had visited us?

Secondly, Zechariah praised God because God has redeemed his people. Redemption was the word used in slave market or pawn shop. Let me tell you one interesting story to help you understand the meaning of the word; redemption. Once a little boy made a boat, lovingly out of a block of wood. He attached a small sail and brought it down to a gentle stream to see it float. Suddenly, it was swept away in the current and carried out to the ocean. The little boy was very sorry to lose his boat. Then one day he was walking by a pawn shop and saw it in the window, with an expensive price tag on it. He had no money. So he took odd jobs and worked hard and bought the boat back. He said, “Little boat, you are twice mine. I made you and I bought you. God says the same thing to Israel and to us: you and I. “I made you and I bought you. You are mine.”

Genesis 1:27 says, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created male and female.” But because of sin, man was enslaved to sin and Satan. Slave cannot redeem themselves. To redeem slave of sin, the price of sin has to be paid and it is death. Bible (Romans 3:23) says “all have sinned…”. There is no exception in that all people are sinners. This means all men are slaves to sin. Unless we are redeemed from our sins, we are eternally slave to sin and Satan no matter what kind of job you have and how nice house you live in. But here is good news. God had come to us and he had redeemed us. How?

Look at verses 69-75. Let’s read these verses all together. “He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and form the hand of all who hate us-to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: 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.” God had raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. His name is Jesus. What is horn? Have you seen mountain elks (big deer) fight each other using their horn? The animals which have horn use their horn as a weapon like bull or ox or mountain deer or goat. The bigger, the stronger. In the bible several times horn was used as a symbol of “strength or power or glory”. Revelation 17:7 describes Satan as the beast which has 7 heads and 10 horns to teach us how powerful Satan is. The fact that Satan has 10 horns means our enemy is very powerful and strong. He is the one who led the first man and woman astray from God and made man slave to sin and Satan. When one is pierced by Satan’s horn even one time, he or she can be critically wounded or fatal. Then, what are the Satan’s horns?

Firstly, it is doubt. One word of doubt doesn’t seem to be so serious. But it is not so. Doubt is one of the most powerful horns of Satan. Satan made the first woman begin to fall from God using just one word of doubt, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” It was planting doubt of God’s love into her heart. When she did not guard her heart with absolute faith in the word of God, she already played with Satan using a word of sweet doubt. What was the result? She consecutively accepted Satan’s lie and she became slave of Satan. How many people become slave of Satan because of their doubt of God’s love?

Pride is also powerful horn of Satan. Satan whispered to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God know that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Since this pride came into the first woman and man’s heart, man became incurable proud slave of Satan. Proud person never repents until he or she almost dies. Some people don’t repent even until they die not knowing they are slave of Satan. How does the horn of salvation Jesus save such proud sinners? The horn of salvation Jesus showed his humility through his incarnation; almighty God became helpless tiny baby in a manger. Holy sinless God became friends of sinners. Before man we can never learn true humility but before Jesus any proud man can become humble. Jesus saves proud man to become humble man.

Fear is most powerful horn of Satan. People become slave to Satan because of fear. We fear many things. Once Dr. Henry said people had hundreds of phobia (fear); fear of people, husband, and wife, fear of teenager, fear of professor, fear of failure, cancer, joblessness, or uncertainty of future, etc. People fear ultimately death. But fundamentally fear comes from the power of sin and not trusting God’s love. But here is good news. The horn of salvation Jesus is stronger than Satan’s fear. He saves us from fear. Jesus paid the price of our sin on the cross and he demonstrated God’s forgiving love toward sinners. Jesus redeemed us from Satan through his death on the cross. Praise Jesus! Amen.

Jesus’ coming is not just an accident or simply regular human event but precise fulfillment of God’s promise made from thousands years ago starting from Abraham to many prophets. Because of the horn of salvation Jesus, now we can serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. Praise Jesus! Amen.

**III. The rising sun (76-80)**

After praising God based on what God had done, Zechariah finally turned his attention to the little baby boy in his arms. Zechariah knew his son John would become a prophet especially the forerunner of Christ Jesus; the horn of salvation to prepare the way for him to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Here the core content of how the horn of salvation Jesus would save people is through the forgiveness of their sins. Sin cannot be solved without forgiveness. If God didn’t decide to forgive men’s sin, all men had to die because all man had sinned against God. But God had mercy on sinners. He decided to forgive sinners through his One and Only Son’s sacrifice. This made a new era in human history.

Look at verses 78-79. Let’s read these verses together. “Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun 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.” The horn of salvation Jesus’ another name is the rising sun. Why can Jesus be called the rising sun? It is because he gets rid of all our darkness. Man’s darkness comes from the power of sin and death. No matter how smart or rich they are, as long as they are ruled by the power of sin and death, they suffer from all kinds of fear and meaninglessness endlessly. Under the power of sin and death, people don’t know real peace and freedom and joy. But the rising sun Jesus gets rid of all our darkness completely. As you know when sun raises, the whole world becomes bright. At that time, no need small candle or bulb light because the sunlight is more than enough to get rid of all darkness. Just like that when Jesus comes into our heart, Jesus alone is more than enough to get rid of all our darkness. What is your darkness? Is it fatalism or defeatism or frustration or despair? Let’s accept Jesus and let him shine on your darkness so that you can be led into his wonderful light and live a new life that is full of peace, freedom, and life. May God bless each of you as each of us close this year and face a new year 2013 through the rising sun Jesus abundantly! Amen.