

THE FIRST 15

Friday, December 13, 2024

By: Jan Davis

Today is Friday, December 13 and this is the second week of the season of Advent. We are studying the song of Zechariah recorded in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed and Holy Lord, my heart is full of hope this Advent season as I anticipate the celebration of the birth of Your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. In the early morning of a dawning December day, I seek Your presence. I calm my thoughts, still my mind and reflect on the words of the priest Zechariah, whose journey of silence became a journey of faith. Let me hear the message you have for me today through the words of this ancient song. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 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.” And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel. Luke 1:76-80

REFLECTION

As Zechariah's song (the Benedictus) rises to a climax he speaks tenderly to his newborn son. He prophesies that the baby John will be God's prophet. He will go before the Messiah and prepare the way for Him. He will awaken people to their sinfulness and reveal their separation from God. He will call them to repentance. God provides a path to salvation and the way is through the Messiah, His Son Jesus.

The little baby John grows into a man. Luke tells us he became strong in spirit and lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly. John the Baptist came on the scene of all four Gospels preaching a baptism of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. He was the messenger promised by the prophet Isaiah, "I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way" (Isaiah 40:3).

When John showed up, enormous crowds came from the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside. They found him in the wilderness. They came to confess their sins and be baptized by him in the Jordan River. John knew he was not the Messiah, but that he was preparing the way for Him. He told the people that someone more powerful would come after him. He said he was not worthy to stoop down and untie the straps of his sandals. He baptized them with water, but the Messiah would baptize them with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:1-8). John's voice was the one crying out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him!" (Isaiah 40:3).

As John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah to come into the world, his message prepares the way for Jesus to come into our hearts. John said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:2). Indeed the kingdom of heaven has come near. God has entered this world through the birth of His one and only Son, Jesus. He came to be with us, dwell with us. Jesus became flesh and lived among us. Immortality put on mortality. God came near in Christ and John calls us to repent, turn around, and give our hearts and lives to Jesus. As Zechariah's song reveals, Jesus is the rising sun that came to us from heaven. He shines on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death. He guides our feet into the path of peace.

Ask: How have I experienced God's kingdom coming near this Advent season? Where in my life do I need to hear John's call to confess, ask for forgiveness, repent, and turn around?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed, loving, merciful and holy Lord God. Thank you for not being willing to leave human souls lost and separated from You. Thank You for loving us so much that You made a way for us to be restored and redeemed. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to be the Light that shines in the darkness. Rescue me from the shadow of death and guide my feet into the path of peace. As I prepare my heart for Christmas, I rejoice in Your goodness, love, compassion, kindness and mercy. Amen.