

## **WELCOME 8 December 2019 – 2 Advent '19 A**

Luke 1:5-25 & 67-69

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship...

Everybody sings...in the car in the shower along with ads on TV...wandering around the house doing odd jobs...on the job? Sometimes life has its own tune... Might be a song of sadness, despair, or frustration...Sometimes though it's a melody of expectation...the old Broadway, *"I'm getting married in the morning..."* Sometimes our life sings toward something new...a promise a pledge a commitment just waiting to be fulfilled. Young children know that sort of song when the tree goes up in the lounge room...& the presents...there's a promise just waiting to be kept.

But when the promise is long coming...or seemingly forgotten...This week we get to sing with a vocalist named Zechariah...who has been waiting so long he's almost forgotten how to sing, but when the promise *IS* kept, when the expectation *IS* fulfilled you can hear his song across the ages.

This week, you're invited to sing that song of promise...that song of fulfilment & praise to the Father *"Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited & redeemed his people" I first memorized that verse... Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has come to his people & set them free.*

Everybody sings...Now it's our turn!

Let's pray...

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot — yes, a new Branch  
bearing fruit from the old root.

And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom &  
understanding, the Spirit of counsel & might, the Spirit of  
knowledge & the fear of the Lord.

He will delight in obeying the Lord...He will give justice to the poor  
& make fair decisions for the exploited.

The earth will shake at the force of his word, & one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked. — Is  
11:1-5

Lord Jesus look upon us, empty vessels that needs to be filled. In faith we are weak—strengthen us. In love we are cold—set us alight so that your love may go out through us to our neighbour. From you we receive goodness, justice & righteousness, but we can give you nothing in return. Therefore we'll stay with you & delight in you; trusting you will use us for your glory. Jesus Christ alone Lord & Saviour we pray in your name --- Amen.

## 2 ADVENT '19 A – CHRISTMAS PLAYLIST: A SONG OF PROMISE

### FAITH CHAT:

1. What's it like for you when you break a promise? Have a promise broken?
2. When you have to wait a looong time for something.....

"May you live in interesting times." Heard that before? "Traditional Chinese curse." Why Chinese? Who knows?...internet says it is an English expression which purports to be a translation of a traditional Chinese curse. While it seems to be a blessing, the expression is usually used ironically. The clear implication is "uninteresting times" of peace & tranquility are more enjoyable than interesting ones, which, usually include disorder & conflict.

You might say this 1<sup>st</sup> 1/5 of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an interesting time. I get told every day the climate will give us mass extinctions in 10-12 years...violent riots in Iran, Hong Kong... protests in Canberra...global relocations of people...prison camps in China...meh... you watch the news. In what is unmistakably one of the most prosperous & across the board safe eras of human history...people are afraid people are worried people think things are collapsing...change of global magnitude seems to be afoot..."interesting times."

Zechariah would never have understood...He lived in a time of relative peace & tranquility. For 'bout 600 years, Israel had been a conquered or at least occupied nation Since Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 587BC, the Jews had been traded back & forth by conquering armies/rulers like relics at a swap meet. Babylon Media Persia Greece Rome... Rome was especially good at keeping things "uninteresting." In fact, if you got too interesting...Romans would just kill you. The Pax Romana/Peace of the Roman Empire was kept at the point of the sword or the arms of a cross.

But even more...Zechariah/Elizabeth had settled into a routine of "uninteresting." Faithful w/o fault, dutiful in their devotion, zealous in their religious obligation, but void of children. Their lives were of a quiet mix of faith/frustration. Faithfulness/futility They were old enough to have quit expecting children but still alive enough to feel their absence. They still wore the stigma of childlessness (your fault God's punishment) even after two lifetimes of devotion to Yahweh. They know their parenting day has past & they've got nothing to show for their faithfulness. They had resigned to uninteresting

They weren't alone in uninteresting. They lived among a people of uninteresting. In fact 400 years of uninteresting...After the exile...when the Jews finally were allowed to return to their decimated cities & towns...when they languished under puppet rule & economic & social disorder...when the temple was a shadow of its former glory... there was this final word from God: *The Lord of Heaven's Armies says, "The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant & wicked will be burned up like straw...But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. You will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture. On the day when I act, you will tread upon the wicked as if they were dust under your feet," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies...* "Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great & dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, & the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come & strike the land with a curse." – *Mal 4:1-6* (selected vss) this reminder that their lives are perpetually in the balance

That...then 400 years of silence. Israel felt for all intents/purposes alone for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in their history. There are no visions....no prophets. There is nothing from God to Israel. Not a word. Not a sign. 400 years of silence/grinding uninteresting drudgery. Every day The same as the one before. Every season TSATOB Every sacrifice. TSATOB Every song. TSATOB Every prayer. TSATOB Same as it ever was...Same as it ever was.

I know a bunch of folks live just like that...Their life story & their life expectation is silence...work eat sleep...get up do some stuff go to bed...Heck...maybe that's you. Like Z & E you do the faithful things you've always done but you've never really seen anything to convince you God's got any real purpose for your life. You can't think what else you'd believe/do except what you've always believed/done, but really, it might just be so much hot air...CS Lewis captures this I think..."Most people, if they really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, & want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise." Dude hits it for 6!

We are hardwired longing for more than this world can offer. We dream bigger than this world. Our aspirations are larger than our lives. Our desires outstrip our ability to fulfil them. And we've been disappointed so often let down so often frustrated so often promises left hanging so often...Z & E have been praying every day since their wedding night for a child & as priest Z has just prayed the daily prayer for Messiah to come & deliver God's people... Those 2 prayers have gone up in some form from somewhere from forever. Something to make life feel compete full fill the void (like child for Z & E) & for God if he's listening to do something to make this world right to do something about the problems & something about the people who cause those problems & something to just make it all all right. It may never sound like a prayer for Messiah...but it surely is...justice right-ness peace help health...

As he stands at the altar in the rebuilt Temple offering the incense which symbolized the prayers of God's people, Z is maybe in the only interesting moment of his life... Of approx. 20K priests in Israel, the dice roll his name to go into the Most Holy Place in the Temple & pour incense on the burning coals on the altar while the people & other priests kneel outside & say their prayers. He stands there in the cloud of burning incense & he prays for the people... & for Messiah & for whatever else is on his heart (I do think maybe he still prays for a child in his old age...it's part of his daily liturgy) This is literally a once-in-a-life-time moment for Zechariah...I'm sure he's praying his guts out...but before he can get to Amen & get out the door ...*an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken & overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, & you are to name him John. You will have great joy & gladness, & many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord...He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. He will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit & power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, & he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."*

Do you think as the angel speaks, Z hears Malachi echoing through the years: *spirit & power of Elijah...prepare the people for the coming of the Lord...turn the hearts of the fathers to their children...* And do you think maybe it's all too much to believe after 400 years of silence? You see...I do believe we grow accustomed to silence. We've been disappointed so often let down so often frustrated so often promises left hanging so often...good things so long in coming that we simply accommodate to silence. To praying w/o expectation. To coming to God w/o faith. To going through the motions/being religious w/o relationship. To worship w/o commitment.

So when that lack of faith – absence of trust – expectation of silence bubbles to Z's lips in a moment of honesty before the Almighty, *"How can I be sure...I'm an old man... my wife is also well along in years"* he actually receives what he expected: silence... But it is Z who will be in silence...a fuller trans of Lk 1:20 - *"Because you do not believe what I have said, you shall **live in silence**, AND you shall be unable to speak a word until the day it happens."* I reckon there's more here than he can't talk...In fact vss 22/62 suggest that not only is he mute but perhaps deaf as well...the word used is *κοφωσ* Kophos can be trans deaf/mute...Z lives in silence until he can give God praise.

In that enforced silence Z/we discover that God is at work, even when you can't yet see it. What you see with your eyes – current circumstances – moment of pain heartache/anguish – complete disaster *IS NOT* God's end game, & until God himself call's time...you keep playing...keep serving keep loving keep giving keep inviting keep praying keep sharing your faith keep opening your hearts/hands/fridge/wallets to the people around you - keep using all you have at your disposal to introduce 1 more person to the God who promises to forgive & restore & bring life in all its fullness & abundance. Z/E prayed what felt like unanswered prayers for years & years...but they forgot that God's work/fulfilling his promises in them was as near as their own name: Zechariah means God remembers. Elizabeth means God's oath/vow/promise. John means God's grace. Even when you can't see it fully God remembers his promise of grace...

*Even the wilderness & desert will be glad in those days. The wasteland will rejoice & blossom with spring crocuses. Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers & singing & joy! The deserts will become as green as the mountains of Lebanon...There the Lord will display his glory...With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, & encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong! Do not fear! Your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you."* *Is 35:1-4*

*"This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: This land—though it is now desolate & has no people & animals—will once more have pastures where shepherds can lead their flocks. Once again shepherds will count their flocks in the towns of the hill country...& all the towns of Judah. I, the Lord, have spoken! "The day will come, says the Lord, when I will do for Israel & Judah all the good things I have promised them...I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David's line. He will do what is just & right throughout the land...Judah will be saved, & Jerusalem will live in safety. And this will be its name: 'The Lord Is Our Righteousness.'" *Jer 33:12-16* Restoration – new life – abundance – every facet of life vibrant & alive... God is at work, even when you can't yet see it. Even when you can't see it fully God remembers his promise of grace*

2<sup>nd</sup>...You have no idea what God may have in store for you just beyond this horrible season you are in right now. *"No eye has seen no ear heard nor mind imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."* *1 Cor 2:9* What prayer have you stopped praying? What prayer do you think God will not answer? Have you begun to believe God is not listening because you've heard "no" or "wait"?

Jeremiah looks through the corridors of time & through the dust & debris & decay of human sin & he sees Jesus...descendant of David, author of the new covenant sealed in his own blood, God's righteousness as a gift for us...God isn't watching from a distance – hasn't forgotten about you but comes in love to bind up what's broken, finish what's fragmented & heal what's hurt. God wants you to experience his grace & goodness & the abundance of his blessing every day of your life forever Into our chaos/clutter/catastrophes...God promises his presence which renews & restores & raises us to the life only He can give. God calls us to see the end of death & decay & the promise of all things made new – of our lives made full – of our joys made complete – our hearts made whole & our lives released in sharing that promise with the world...

Say this with me...let's pray with Zechariah: *Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has come to his people & set them free. – Amen – Now we can sing...Star Child*