New Hope Drawing Near

The Rev. Amanda Horan ’20

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his child David,
70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.
72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors
and has remembered his holy covenant,
73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us 74 that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness
in his presence 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 his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.
78 Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
79 to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

80 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel. (Luke 1:67–80)

As the parent of a toddler, I sometimes joke that singing makes up most of my parenting strategy. I have songs to help my daughter go to sleep and to wake up. I have songs to teach her how to be patient and some just to make her laugh. And I have songs that I hope will teach her *who* she is and *whose* she is. It seems to me that Zechariah is doing something similar in his song.

His offering of praise comes as an exclamation point after many months of silence. Earlier in Luke’s Gospel, an angel visits the priest Zechariah to inform him that he and his wife, Elizabeth, will have a child. Perhaps understandably, Zechariah, who is getting on in years, expresses some hesitation. The consequence for his hesitation is speechlessness until the promised child has arrived.

When the day comes for their son to be named, Elizabeth says that contrary to custom, the boy will not be called Zechariah after his father, but John. Confused, their family and friends seek confirmation from Zechariah, who writes out his agreement. Immediately his mouth opens, and he praises God.

Before his family and neighbors—and most importantly, before his infant son—Zechariah sings of God’s faithfulness to God’s people and the new hope drawing near. Zechariah’s song points to the remarkable good news of the Christmas story: the Christ child will soon be born into a story so deeply human.

Zechariah sings of the dawn soon to break into the lives of those who doubt, those who speak when they should be silent, and those who are silent when they should speak. The dawn breaks on those who rejoice with loved ones and those who struggle to understand one another. God's mercy is made all the more tender as it will soon be swaddled in his mother's arms.

God chooses not to love us from a distance. This is the identity Zechariah sings over his son, and his words echo down the generations for all the children of God.

Prayer: *Blessed be the Lord, for Your faithfulness echoes throughout the generations. May we sing our song of hope with new voices as we await the dawning of Christ's light again in our hearts. Shine on all those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and guide our feet in the way of peace. Amen.*