

Sunday, December 1, 2024 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

「**Benedictus**」 Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Genesis 22:15~18, Luke 1:67~80

### ❶ 【Reason for not being able to speak】

We enter Advent today. The first to appear in the Christmas story are the priest Zachariah, the parents of John the Baptist, and his wife Elisabeth. They were both righteous people who believed in God, but they had no children and they were both already old. Zachariah is serving incense burning in the sanctuary of the temple when the archangel Gabriel appears and tells him that his wife Elisabeth is going to have a child, but Zachariah is unable to believe it. Gabriel said, "For they did not believe my words, which will come true in time" (Luke 1:20). God's work of salvation will be realized when the time comes, regardless of human conditions.

●An old monk said: "No matter how much we pray, we cannot make the sun rise quickly, but when the sun rises, we can wake up and be ready." All we can do is silently accept God's deeds. People should not interfere, nor should they interfere.

Zachariah could not hear the message of the same angel Gabriel, but Mary conceived life in her womb. The old priesthood system, which has ceased to have life, will be abolished, and "Mary" will appear as a temple that will have new life. The inability to speak is also a symbol that the language of the priests who serve the old ones has become a dead language. However, by serving Jesus, Zachariah's life was restored and he began to speak new words (prophecies).

### ❷ 【The Lord visited his people and set them free】

When the child was born, Zachariah the priest opened his mouth, praised God, and prophesied filled with the Holy Spirit. This is one of the eight songs in the Bible that came to be sung in churches. The first words of this prophecy, "Praise be to you," are called "Benedictus" in Latin, so the whole song is also called that. "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to his people and set them free, and has raised up for us the horn of salvation from the house of his servant David." (Verses 68~69) The "horn of salvation" refers to the Messiah. (Psalm 18:2~3) God will come down to us. Deliverance is not due to human power, but to God. When God comes into human history, we are liberated. So what do we get rid of? What do you want to be free from? Zachariah said, "Our enemies, deliverance from the hands of those who hate us all" (vv.71, 72).

The Israelites experienced slavery in Egypt, slavery in Babylon, slavery in Persia, slavery in Rome, and were persecuted all over the world, and Nazi

Germany became the enemy in the last war. They think that if they don't get stronger, they will become slaves again, so they create a state, they have a powerful army, they drive out the Palestinians, and they make terrorists their enemies. Russia's Putin is also spreading the war more and more. Who will be their real enemy? Are you Palestinian? Is it NATO? Isn't it the fear that is within us? Isn't it unbelief that we can't believe in God's promises? That would be the enemy we really had to fight. Yet, they blame the problems on the countries and people around them. They have become slaves to the fear of losing their country, the fear of death, the fear of being persecuted.

● There is an interesting story from Nehemiah chapter 6. When Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem from Persia, he begins to rebuild the walls, but the people who do not like him interfere and call Nehemiah four times and try to kill him. But he doesn't respond, so I send him a letter. It reads, "It is rumored among the nations that you and the people of Judah are plotting treason, and Gashum is saying... You are about to become king of the people of Judah. ... Now this rumor is about to reach the king. Let's talk about it right away." (Nehemiah 6:6~7) There is no word that threatens us more than the words that everyone is saying. Today's young people are extremely afraid of people's words and evaluations, and they commit suicide if they are criticized even slightly. Because they do not fear God, but fear people.

This is what was written in Pastor Yasuo Enomoto's book. "During the war, there was a man named Issei Muramoto who refused to serve in the military, and he refused to participate in a war in which Japan people participated as a matter of course, and Mami Inagaki, who wrote about him, concludes with the words, 'Only a very small number of people were able to persist in their refusal because they had another kingdom as their inner core.' It is only by living in a kingdom different from other people, in a different standard, that man can be free from others and walk the path of truth."

We also have another kingdom as a nucleus. It is the kingdom of God. We live in this world just to get there. We have already died in this world. Our standard is Christ. I live my life thinking about what pleases Christ, not people. It is only my sins that can separate us from that kingdom, and man cannot do anything to me. I'm not interested in people's evaluations at all. Those who believe in God know that the real enemy is the sin within them.

### ③ **【God always keeps his promises ~ Have hope ~】**

Zachariah tells us that this salvation was a promise that was first promised to Abraham, and that it had been prophesied by the prophets. "The Lord has

mercy on our fathers and remembers his holy covenant, which is an oath made to our father Abraham." (vv. 72~73) The oath made to Abraham is, "I will bless you abundantly, and I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven and like the sand of the sea. All the nations of the earth shall be blessed by thy seed." (Genesis 22:16~18). Abraham was a man who lived about 1,800 years before Jesus was born. It's a long story because you say that you fulfilled the promise you made to that person 1800 years later. But what moves me is that "the Lord ... He remembers that holy covenant." (72). Even if we forget, He remembers. No matter how negative our circumstances are, God fulfills His promises. The Savior was said to come from the seed of David. Joseph is a descendant of David, but the king of Israel at that time is Herod, a foreigner. The Davidic dynasty was depressed, poor, grounded, and on the verge of disappearing. From the human eye, it looks impossible no matter how you look at it. But God fulfilled His promise. Once God has made a promise, He will always fulfill it. We want to be hopeful about that.

● There is a difference between aspiration and hope. Desire comes from man, but hope comes from God. Henri Nouwen said:  
"We are full of wishes, and when we wait, we are so entangled in these desires... It is a way of life that tries to manipulate the future as it wishes. ... But Zacharias, Elisabeth, Mary and Simeon were not filled with "aspirations." They were filled with "hope". ... Hope is believing that something will come true, but it does so according to God's promises, not simply by our wishes. ... I have learned that it is important to let go of desires and have hope in my life. ... It's about trusting in the unimaginable things that are about to happen to you. It's about letting go of trying to manipulate your future and letting God decide your life."

Letting God decide your life would not be possible without faith in trusting Him. Do not look at the world or people, but turn your heart to God. It is only when we look up to God that we can have hope and shine. I trust in God. This world is His kingdom, created by Christ. It's like hell right now, but it will surely be the kingdom of God. Because God does not forget His promises. Let us keep our heads up, have hope in God, and continue to wait for the completion of His kingdom.