

Children of Prophecy

Luke 1:68-79

WHY WE SING

We sing for many reasons. In worship this week, we listened to – and perhaps sang along with – David and Lori Hobbs, as they sang in praise and celebration, of worship and thanksgiving, of joy and hope – you can find examples of songs like these in the biblical book of the Psalms. The Psalms also contain songs of prayer and grief, perhaps you have sung these songs as well. Have you ever sung out of desperation? Or because it's the only thing you have left to do? I've been there:

Georgie's birthday will be on Wednesday, and she has grown into a fine woman who brings me enormous joy and pride, yet 23 years ago, when she screamed every day from 5:00 at night till 4:00 in the morning, my joy was far from complete. After nursing her and changing her diaper for the millionth time, all I had left to do was hold her, walk her, and sing...

Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle bell rock
Jingle bells swing and jingle bells ring
Snowin' and blowin' up bushels of fun
Now the jingle hop has begun...

SONGS IN LUKE

In Luke's gospel, the author includes three songs, and all of them have to do with babies. One is called the Magnificat – the song Mary sings when her cousin Elizabeth blessed Mary and her unborn child; one is called the Song of Simeon, when an old man sang praise to God as he held the eight-day-old Jesus; and then there is the less well known Song of Zechariah which Luke includes between the other two songs, one that is called the Benedictus for its first two words, "Blessed be..."

This is the Song of Zechariah as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 1:68-79 ...

"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 servant 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 before him 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 knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Zechariah sang these words over his newborn son, the one who would grow up to be the man we know as John the Baptist. The song he sang was the first thing out of his mouth after having been mute for the previous nine months.

ZECHARIAH'S JOY

To know how Zechariah got into that predicament, you have to back up to an earlier part of Luke. Beginning in Luke 1:5, we learn that Zechariah was an elderly priest of Israel, married to Elizabeth, who had no children despite his long marriage to her. When it came Zechariah's turn to serve in the Temple, the priests drew lots and Zechariah was chosen to enter the sanctuary of the LORD to burn incense. When he was there, the angel Gabriel appeared and told Zechariah that his prayers had been answered. His wife would bear a son who would turn the people of Israel to God and prepare them for the coming of the Lord. Zechariah, like Abraham before him, doubted that this would be possible: "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." Gabriel must have been put out because he replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Imagine having such joyous news but not being able to tell anyone about it! And then imagine having to keep the good news to yourself until your child was first conceived and then developed for the next 40 weeks! I think Zechariah was ready to explode by the time his son was born. After confirming – in writing – that the baby's name was John, Zechariah's tongue was loosed, and he literally sang for joy.

His song went further than his own happiness, however. During his song, he proclaimed the prophecy given to him by the angel Gabriel – that his child would be "called the prophet of the Most High; and would go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins." This good news was more than a cradle song; it would end up touching the lives and preparing the hearts of millions of people throughout history.

WAITING TO SING

We are waiting. We *have been* waiting, for years and for lifetimes. You may be looking around the world and wondering, "Where is the peace that was promised?" You may think that the Realm of God isn't a possibility. Let me assure you, it is before us in the here and now; it is in us and through us that Emmanuel has come and will be coming. Perhaps we should be waiting no longer; the world is ready to hear the song of joy that has been building within us.

Now is the time to open our mouths to sing the message of repentance and forgiveness. Now is the time to sing out and prepare the way for the Lord. There are so many people who have been waiting for something to hold on to. We must pave the way between them and God with the song of grace. Just as Zechariah sang over his son - prophesying the future of his child - Jesus has sung over us. Just as John grew to fulfill his father's vision, we have grown to fulfill the prophecy of our Father. We are the children of prophecy. Let us sing to the world until all people brim with joy and can't help but join the song.