

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Second Sunday of Advent
December 7, 2025
9:30 AM

Text: Luke 1:57-79

Theme: Prepare the Way for the Lord: Zechariah's Prophecy

[prayer]

Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure of this? My wife and I are very old." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in God's presence. I was sent to speak to you and to bring this good news to you. Know this: What I have spoken will come true at the proper time. But because you didn't believe, you will remain silent, unable to speak until the day when these things happen." (Luke 1:18-20)

The Prophet Habakkuk once declared, "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!" (2:20 NRSVUE).

I emerged from morning prayer in the Chapel on Monday to discover snow falling outside. With it came a welcome sense of quiet. The world did not slow down just because it snowed, but the sounds of our anxious hurrying were muffled. I felt a hush descend on my spirit.

Advent is an invitation to stillness and silence. Stillness is very much at odds with our to-do lists this time of year. But the falling snow, the dying of the light, the winter quiet – these are reminders. The earth is preparing herself to receive her King. She is wise in ways the modern world has forgotten. She knows the meaning of reverence.

To *revere* or *reverence* something means "to stand in awe." My formal title is Reverend, which shares a Latin root with *revere*. It originated in medieval English and means "a person to be revered." This is not because clergy are holier than anyone else. In the Middle Ages the job of a priest was to represent God to the congregation. The priest stood in the place of Christ at the altar as *Alter Christus* ("another Christ"). In the Catholic Church this is still the role of the priest. But the

Protestant Reformation eliminated the hierarchy between clergy and laity by emphasizing the priesthood of all believers. We believe that all Christians belong to a priestly class. We are all called to stand in the temple of the earth and lead the world in worship. As someone who bears the title Reverend, I have been set apart by the Church to lead *you* in worship, but every one of us has been created to proclaim the faithful love of our God to all creation.

At the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Zechariah emerged from the inner sanctum deaf and mute. He was unable to tell the assembled congregation what had happened to him, but everyone understood he had encountered the LORD. After his period of service was complete, Zechariah went home. Somehow, he communicated to Elizabeth the good news she would at last bear his son. As Gabriel promised, she conceived and immediately she went into a period of seclusion. Her decision to physically isolate herself mirrored Zechariah's auditory isolation. It was a response to God's gracious action on her behalf: "This is the Lord's doing. He has shown his favor to me" (Luke 1:25 CEB).

Worship is how we respond to God's faithful action in our lives. God's overwhelming mercy and love can only be met with awe and wonder. But awe necessitates stillness. What do we do when we have hiked to the top of a mountain? We pause and admire the view. Or when we see a beautiful piece of art? We linger over its beauty. Or when we hear a moving piece of music? We close our eyes and feel it pulse through us. The holiness, majesty, and marvelous works of God are even more arresting than these.

After nine months of silence, Zechariah opens his mouth and out flows a song of praise. But before the praise came the silence, the wondering. Zechariah's forced muteness and Elizabeth's confinement created space for them both to reflect on what God was doing. Silence births praise. We wait for God, we pay attention for the signs of his grace and mercy, we treasure those signs in our hearts, and then we offer our hearts up to God in gratitude. Worship can happen anywhere, anytime, in all kinds of different ways – but we must first create space in our lives to worship. Our lives cannot be too busy, too noisy, too crowded for the essential work God has given us: To bless the world.

Zechariah's song is called the *Benedictus*, from the opening line: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel" (v. 68 NRSVUE). The first words Zechariah utters after nine

months of silence are words of blessing. They are a psalm of praise to God and a prophetic word – a *berakah* – spoken over his infant son.

The *berakah* begins by expressing praise and gratitude to God – “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them” (v. 68). Zechariah then blesses his son specifically: “You, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins” (vv. 76-77). These powerful words demonstrate the nature of a blessing. A blessing is all about projecting good into the life of another person. The words of a blessing cast a vision for the future and claim that future with hope, faith, and intention. Artist Hannah Garrity writes, “Zechariah sees what his son will become and begins to speak his future into being from the start. As dawn breaks over Zechariah’s shoulder, his prophecy foretells God coming into the world—of light dawning in weary spaces.”¹

Zechariah’s blessing is not only for his son; it is for all people. He makes his prayer big enough to enfold the surrounding community and the world. “By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (vv. 78-79). The whole world will be blessed by the infant John’s life – a child who eventually grows into John the Baptist, who stands in the temple of the earth, preparing the way for Jesus Christ, the savior of the world.

Zechariah speaks a *berakah* over John, and he speaks one over us, too. The blessing is this: That God loves us too deeply to leave us in darkness. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ redeems us from the dark. Now we can see God in a new light, and we live our lives differently as a result. Saint Paul put it this way in his Letter to the Romans: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12:2 NIV).

Zechariah’s song inaugurates the new era that comes to pass with the Incarnation. Salvation comes through Jesus Christ who even now, as Zechariah sings, is growing in Mary’s womb. Zechariah understood salvation as Israel’s deliverance from Roman oppression. But the true end of God’s salvation is not

¹ “Berakah” by Hannah Garrity. A Sanctified Art LLC (sanctifiedart.org).

merely political. It is deliverance from the things that keep us separated from each other and God. John will prepare the way for the Lord by teaching about the forgiveness of sins. He will teach people how to reconcile with each other and the Lord. He will help people know who God is and what the kingdom of God is truly about – a kingdom of mercy, justice, and righteousness. When the light dawns on our darkness and we begin to understand God's perfect will for creation, we can join our voices with Zechariah and John, serve God without fear, and lead the world in worshiping him in holiness and righteousness. This is our priestly duty as the people of God who have been called into His marvelous light.

Church, just as Zechariah spoke words of blessing over us, we have been called to speak words of blessing over the world. Especially when we are feeling defeated by the suffering, evil, and injustice we encounter, speaking words of blessing can encourage us to hold onto hope and plant seeds of justice and peace. Words of blessing remind us who God is and that God looks upon us with favor. Words of blessing are the foundation for actions that build God's promised kingdom. Today we prepare the way for the Lord by standing in the temple of the earth and declaring that the darkness has not overcome the light.

[Invite congregation to stand for Jan Richardson's "Blessing the Way."²]

² <https://adventdoor.com/2011/12/01/advent-2-blessing-the-way/>