

THE BENEDICTUS

THE LESSON: THE BENEDICTUS

Throughout Old Testament times, numerous prophets appeared with the mission of turning God’s people back to him. Many of the prophets also spoke about a promised Messiah who would come to save God’s people. The New Testament tells the story of God fulfilling that promise through Jesus. But there was one last late-appearing prophet who arrived on the scene to point the way to Jesus more directly, and that was John the Baptist.

The canticle we know as the “Benedictus” (Latin for “Blessed be”, the first words of the song) comes from John the Baptist’s father, a devout man named Zechariah. “Zechariah”, a fairly popular name in the Old Testament, means “the Lord remembers”. In a sense, the whole story we’re looking at today is about God remembering, even when his people were past hoping that he would.

Consider the story we acted out in the opening exercise. The angel Gabriel appeared with the words “Your prayer has been answered”, and yet this prayer was clearly not a recent one, because Zechariah had stopped believing it to be possible! So God’s “yes” to Zechariah and Elizabeth’s prayer for children was coming very late. And yet God remembered. Not only was God specifically remembering Zechariah and Elizabeth, but through their son and their son’s mission of pointing to Jesus, God was remembering the promises that he had made to all of Israel.

As we read through Zechariah’s prophetic song, pay special attention to the words that give us a clue as to Zechariah’s understanding of what God is like.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a few moments to ask yourself whether there is a prayer that you have given up hope that God will hear. Remember the angel Gabriel’s words to Zechariah, “Do not be afraid... your prayer has been heard...” Offer your prayer afresh to God, remembering that he may say “yes”, “no”, or “wait”. Ask for his help to trust that he hears and cares.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (COLLECT FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, BCP PAGE 123)

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LUKE 1: **GOD HAS REMEMBERED**

⁶⁸“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— ⁷²to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, ⁷⁷to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven ⁷⁹to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”