

2. Advent: Christ's birth announced (Lk. 1: 5-25)

Dear Listeners,

Last week we started with Luke 1 as a series of *Advent* messages. *Advent* means "com-
ing," hence in these weeks before Christmas we focus on the *coming* of Jesus Christ into this world, on His *birth*. Although it is a good thing to consider the *Advent* of the *Christ* during these weeks before *Christmas*, we have to do so as people who are living *long after His coming*! In fact, we pay this attention to the Advent of the Saviour in a time in which *we* ourselves anticipate *His second coming*! For us it's a time of *Advent* the whole year through, for centuries already! Or is it? Do we truly *expect* His coming? Or is it just a matter of us *knowing* that He comes, for that's what the *Bible* says; yet, it doesn't really function in our life? Perhaps you pray, "Your Kingdom come," but does the *coming* of the King determine your life? I know that many are saying, "I know that He *will* come, but I don't really count on it; He won't come, *not in my time* anyway." If that is so, they may be mistaken. Sure, the time of His coming may seem long, yet *He is coming*! We must long for this time, *expecting* that He could come *in our time* indeed! That's what we can learn from *Zechariah*, the priest. That's what the gospel in Luke 1: 5-25 concerning Christ's *first coming* teaches us! Please read this passage if you can!

When we look at the *circumstances*, dear listeners, and consider the facts concerning the progress of the church in the world, we may question whether the Christ *will* ever come. The *facts* make the fulfilment of God's promise seem impossible. Behind this world, however, is the *reality* of God's *faithfulness*! His *Word* teaches us to move on in history confidently, assured that God will fulfil His Word. It may look dark in the world. The church may be facing much misery in the midst of it. Yes, also in your *personal* life there may be the feeling sometimes that God is *absent*. Still, He *is* there! He *has come* and He *will* be coming! The light of Christmas has lit up this world in the *coming* of its *Saviour*, and it will once more! The great change in the history of the world *did* take place once already, and it *will* again! In a world that was filled with enmity, suppression, and insignificance for the people of God, the great turn-about *did* take place! How? When? Through *prayer*! At the hour of *prayer* in the temple, that's where and *when* it came! That's what *Zechariah* learned. He heard the beginning of the gospel of it in the message concerning the birth of his son, who would be the *herald* of the king!

What a beautiful day it was in the life of Zechariah when the *lot was cast* and the LORD determined that *he* would serve in the temple *that* day. Although the priests served in the temple for a week twice a year, it usually happened only *once* in a priest's life time that he was chosen by lot to bring the incense into the *holy part* of the temple!

For *Zechariah*, however, the day became *more beautiful* yet because of the things that happened *while* he went about his tasks in this service! During the evening offering on the Sabbath most likely, the people of God are together for *prayer*. They pray for the fulfilment of the promises, the fulfilment of the sacrifices, for the *coming* of the blood of the Lamb that will give Himself for the life of His people! Prayers go up for the *coming* of the great *king*, who would topple Herod's throne! God's people pray for the fulfilment of the *Advent of the Saviour* and Redeemer as prophesied! It's at *that* moment that God reacts to these prayers. It's at *that* time that *Zechariah's* day becomes more beautiful yet! Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. To *Zechariah*, who is standing there, startled and trembling with fear, he says, "Do not be afraid, *Zechariah*; *your prayer has been heard.*"

"Your prayer has been heard!" the angel said. *What* prayer? *Whose* prayer? The prayers of *both* *Zechariah* and his wife *Elizabeth* and the prayer of God's people *Israel*! *Elizabeth* will bear a *son* who will bring the grace of God to His people. He will be a joy and delight to you, the angel said, and to many! Their son *John* will get a great place in God's plan of salvation! He will be the *herald* of the Messiah, *Jesus the Christ*, even! He will bring back those who have strayed from the LORD and prepare the hearts of parents and children for the *coming* of the Saviour! That may *seem unlikely*, to *Zechariah* and *Elizabeth* because they are passed the age of child-bearing, and to the people of *Israel* who no longer expected the fulfilment of His promises anymore. Yet, at this time the LORD places the prayers of *Zechariah* and his wife, as well as the prayers of the people *Israel* in the *larger context* of His plan of salvation! He gives his personal prayers a place on the way of redemption via *Christmas*, *Easter*, and the return of *Christ*! That's a wonderful message for *Zechariah* and *for us* today! What an encouragement this message is, dear listeners, for the *church today*, the church of the new dispensation that's awaiting the *Second Advent*!

This announcement of the birth of *John*, the herald, dear listeners, and implicitly the announcement of the *birth of the King Jesus Christ*, came to a people in serious decline. O sure, there still were people who were looking forward to the redemption of *Israel*, people like *Zechariah* and *Elizabeth* for instance, yet the *majority* of the people did no longer; yes, even among the faithful ones they did *not* await the birth of the Saviour for their salvation, for their deliverance from sin and guilt! What a moment therefore this was, when the angel of the LORD comes down from God and announces the *new time* that's coming! It will be *John's* calling to bring the people back from wickedness, back from a worldly lifestyle, to the LORD in a sincere repentance from sin! That's *how* the LORD wants to see His people when He *comes*! Living in the *advent* of the Lord, there-

fore, means living *for* the Lord, ready and willing to *serve* Him! Hence, the question is relevant today: are *you* ready for the *Advent* of the Lord?

Let's learn an important *lesson* from this story about *Zechariah*, dear listeners. Was *he* ready? Was *he* expecting the coming of the Messiah? He prayed for it and he spoke about it, but was he doing so in the *real anticipation* that the Christ *would come*; in *his* life time? According to *God's Word*, His promises and prophecies? No! Zechariah's reaction to the message of the angel is one of *unbelief*! Believing in the fulfilment of God's promises, dear listeners, appears very difficult, even for a believer and priest like Zechariah! He wanted a *sign*, which he received in being *dumb* (i.e. unable to speak) until the day his son will be born, which is a sign signifying his *unbelief*. It means that the *message* of the Advent of Israel's redemption remains unheard! Hence, it appears possible to be an upright believer in the sight of God, to know the whole Word of God, and yet *remain unfruitful, unbelieving*, for the coming of the kingdom of God, for the *coming* of the *Saviour* of the world! The LORD, however, does *not* depend on us for the execution of His plans! It *was* the time of the *Advent* of the Saviour, and He *did* come! It's the time of the Advent *still*, and *He comes*, whether we believe it or not! When He comes, will He find *you* longing for His coming, *expecting* Him in faith, and *rejoicing* at the completion of His salvation, in response to His Word, to this message as well?