

## **Remembrance Sunday Sermon 9.11.25**

**Revelation 21:1-6a, Luke 1-68-79 (Psalm 46)**

**The Dawn from on High will break upon us...**

**God's Sunrise will break in upon us....**

When the immediate and concrete realities threaten to overwhelm us and lead us towards despair, as God's people, or seekers after the transcendent – we turn God-wards in our human frailty. We reach out in prayer, in song, in silence, in Scripture, in nature, alone and together in corporate worship.

Today, on Remembrance Sunday, our Scriptures enlarge our vision, pointing our bleary eyes to the dawn from on high, the Morning Star who will give light to those who sit in darkness and to guide our feet into the way of peace. Zechariah's song helps us to find our way in the light of God's promises and faithfulness.

Let's go back to Zechariah's story for the context of this song. He was a priest who had been on duty in the sanctuary offering incense (remember Georges who gave us a compelling rendition last year! Of Zechariah). An angel (remember Mike French last year!) had appeared to him, announcing that his barren wife, of a good age – at least 60!, would conceive and bear a son. Zechariah's vision of life was the reality of old age and of living in the shadows of Roman occupation and restriction, longing for God to rescue his people. He could not conceive of his wife bearing a child and was thus struck dumb – until the day that the words of the angel would be fulfilled.

We pick up the story soon after his wife Elizabeth has given birth and taken her 8-day old baby boy to be circumcised (which was the Jewish equivalent of baptism). At the naming of his son – John – Zechariah's mouth was opened and his tongue freed. Full of the Holy Spirit, even in his present realities of darkness – he sang out his joy, praising God for visiting his people through a promised Saviour. Suddenly the whole landscape of salvation opens out – stretching back to God's promises and covenant, through the prophets of old and looking forward to forgiveness of sins and the dawn from on high that will break upon them – upon us... (Slide).

The role of Zechariah's son John – will be to prepare people for this Saviour, calling them to turn their lives around towards forgiveness, preparing their hearts to receive the Christ.

I would like to use this Song of Zechariah – also called the Benedictus (the Latin for Blessed) – to help us on this Remembrance Sunday – to remember together.

So I invite you to head back to the week of 24 February 2022, to the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It may be hard for us to recollect the trauma of the first and second world wars, but we are much closer in time to this ongoing conflict on European soil. I remember waking up to the news that Russia had invaded Ukraine. I recall coming to church the following Sunday, presiding over the early morning Eucharist through tears, sensing anxiety, fear and upheaval all around us.

At the outbreak of the war, Revd Canon Malcolm Rogers, a fellow Anglican Chaplain in the Diocese in Europe was based at St Andrews in Moscow. He had been learning the Benedictus by heart which had been helping him through sleepless nights, recalling him to God's promise through Zechariah's song. On 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022, an online prayer service drew worshippers together from across our Diocese in Europe to pray for peace. It included members of St Andrew's Moscow – AND – their fellow Christians in Christ Church Anglican chaplaincy in Kyiv.

Malcolm observed: "It seems that a deep darkness – political, economic and military –has fallen on Ukraine and is falling on Russia."

He then spoke powerfully about the huge amount of fear overshadowing life:

- "Like everyone, there is the fear of what happens if it all gets out of control, especially if there is along conflict
- Fear of what it means for the future of both Ukraine and Russia. One man was predicting the return of totalitarianism. Thus, people fear for the economy – a return to the early 1980s.
- Fear of total isolation from the West, of becoming a hated pariah people. (More than a few have said that they are ashamed of being Russian.)

He went on to say, “There is also a great fear among the foreign community – fear of the consequence of financial sanctions – eg getting hold of foreign currency – students from abroad with no source of income – and the fear that we can’t get out of the country – feeling trapped – Thus the mass exodus that took place.. including Malcolm and his wife who left the following summer.”

Yet – despite all this fear and darkness – the promise and hope of the Benedictus was sustaining Malcolm through many a sleepless night. I recall being very moved by his words, which I filed away.

He said:

“[Zechariah’s song] speaks of a mighty saviour who has come to set his people free from their enemies.

The enemy we face is not political but supra-political. We do not, as Christian believers, fight against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Jesus defeated those forces not by getting an army and crushing his enemy by force, not by blood taken – but by blood given.

He defeated the true enemy – of pride and hatred and bitterness, lies and fear and cruelty... by his sacrifice of himself, his speaking the truth, doing acts of service and showing love.

Malcolm concluded: “He defeated the true enemy by going to the cross in love for us.”

The Benedictus speaks of a new dawn, and of peace, when the Messiah comes. It speaks of how the dawn will break on people to give light to those in darkness and the shadow of death.

Our Revelation passage fills out this promise, with Christ’s words: I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” God will make his home among mortals (us) and will wipe every tear from their eyes.

We are followers of the crucified but Risen Son of God – Good Friday is not the end! The Morning Star – who comes like the dawn from on high to break upon us, will give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and will guide our feet into the way of peace, as God did for Zechariah all those centuries ago.

As God's people today, wrestling with themes of war and peace, loss and self-gift, memory and forgetfulness, we live in the "Now and Not Yet Kingdom of God." Bishop George Bell's words ring out afresh for us:

Speaking in November 1939 he said, "In the face of war the function of the Church is to be Church."

I encourage you to choose a psalm, canticle, portion of Scripture that explodes with fresh meaning for you – to learn it by heart so that it becomes written on your heart and in your life. As Christ's body – the Church – we daily seek to trust in our Saviour, looking for the Dawn to break upon us – to give us light and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Amen.

**O Holy, Redeeming One,**

**may the Spirit who so inspired Zechariah,**

**give light to us today and to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,**

**and guide our feet into the way of peace.**

**In the Name of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, our Saviour, Amen.**