God Sent a Savior

Read Luke 1:57-58, 67-79

Key verses: **"You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way. You will tell his people how to be saved through the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77).**

This Christmas season the news has been dominated by the death, and subsequent celebration of the life, of Nelson Mandela. Mandela led the struggle against South Africa's brutal, racist apartheid system. For 27 years as a political prisoner, Mandela spent his days breaking rocks in the limestone quarry on Robben Island.

When he was released in 1990, Mandela led a remarkable journey toward national reconciliation. He forgave the oppressors who had taken away so much of his life, and urged his fellow citizens to offer forgiveness rather than revenge.

In recent days, as the people of South Africa celebrated the life of Nelson Mandela, they celebrated a man who helped save them from oppression and injustice. In a few days now, we will celebrate the birth of the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save us all, not only from the shackles of human injustice. He came also to save us from sin and alienation from God, and to give us eternal life!

Zechariah prophesied the coming of this Savior, Jesus Christ, who would save his people and all the people of the world. Zechariah predicted that this Savior would fulfill the Old Testament prophesies of a messiah. And Zechariah rejoiced to see that his own son, John, had been chosen to prepare the way for the Savior who was about to be born....

Zechariah prophesied the coming of a Savior, who would save Israel: "Bless the Lord God of Israel because he has come to help and has delivered his people. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David's house, just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago" (vv. 68-70).

Zechariah prophesied that this Savior would fulfill the Old Testament

promises of a Messiah: "He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and remembered his holy covenant, the solemn pledge he made to our ancestor Abraham" (vv. 72-73a).

This Savior would offer a salvation that includes liberation from the forces of injustice and oppression: "He has brought salvation from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us" (v. 71). "He has granted that we would be rescued from the power of our enemies so that we could serve him without fear" (v. 74).

In Zechariah's time, Israel was looking for a political and military savior who would liberate them from their Roman oppressors. So, Israel struggled to recognize Jesus as their Messiah, when he came preaching non-violent resistance to evil and love for one's enemies. But the movement Jesus started has inspired the ongoing march toward social justice and liberation from every systemic evil that oppresses and de-humanizes people.

This Savior, Jesus, would offer salvation not only from the shackles of social injustice but also from the darkness of sin and alienation from God: "You will tell his people how to be saved through the forgiveness of their sins. Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace" (vv. 77-79).

What a Savior!

I am reminded again, this Advent and Christmas, of these words written by D.A. Carson:

If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, He would have sent an economist.

If God had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, He would have sent a comedian or an artist.

If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, He would have sent us a politician.

If God had perceived that our greatest need was health, He would have sent us a doctor.

But God perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from Him, our profound rebellion, our death; and He sent us a Savior.

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