

# Written Copy: Luke 1:68-75 “The LORD Who Comes to Save”

## Midweek Advent Service #3

December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Text: Luke 1:68-75

<sup>68</sup> "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; <sup>72</sup> to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup> that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

### Exegetical Statement (the text's context)

Israel was getting what it earned and deserved in the attacks by Midian. As the LORD had told them, if they turned away from worshipping Him, He would remove His hand of protection and allow trouble to come upon them. When they complain and cry out He sends a prophet to remind them why this is happening. Then the LORD Himself comes and appears to call a most unlikely candidate to be the human means through which He would save them. The LORD designs this salvation to come in a way that shows it is by His power and might that His people are saved. It's not the strategy of Gideon as a commander, or his courageousness since he was hiding in a wine press when the LORD came to him. It was not even because of Gideon's great faith since he needed several supernatural signs in order to move forward and God commanded him. It was not because of the military prowess of His army. It is the LORD who brings to bare psychological warfare upon them so that in fear of 300 men, when there are 450 to 1 odds in their favor, they turn on each other and kill one another without Israel even drawing the sword. Yet even as Gideon gives the battle cry he succumbs to the sin of mankind by shouting "For the LORD and for Gideon"; he wants to take credit where credit for victory and salvation belong to God alone.

### Focus Statement:

Just as He did with Israel, God has come to us, undeserving as we are, and has accomplished salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He came to be the atoning sacrifice promised to Abraham. He came to take on sin, death, and the devil for us and win a resounding victory, even though by the worlds standards it looked to be the opposite. He comes today in Word and Sacrament to be present in our ongoing battles with temptation and sin, and to give to us His victory even when we suffer defeat. He keeps us in faith so that no matter what happens in this world, our place in the perfect world to come is protected and assured.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

As we live in a world where evil and struggles seem to attack on all fronts, including: COVID, High School shootings and threats of violence, natural disasters, global threats of warfare, we can feel as abandoned as Gideon felt. We too can forget God's past acts of salvation, and His promises to come. We can lose sight of what Christ's death and resurrection should mean to us in the midst of all this

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

In the midst of our struggles with sin, and in the midst of what looks like defeat in the world, hold fast by faith that Christ is the victor over all that would seek to destroy us eternally, and is protecting us as He makes us see the victory is always His, not ours, and given to us by grace.

### Subject Sentence: Christ came to be the sole source of our salvation

## **Introduction**

What does it take to win in football? Being a Lions fan the answer should be, “I really don’t know”. Well, we did win that one time 2 weeks ago, but many Lions fans, if there are indeed any left who call themselves that, would say that was a fluke thing. And it was by chance that they won, that our Quarterback was able to fit the ball in between the Minnesota Viking defenders. And even more amazing is that the receiver was able to catch it and hold on to it, while sitting in the end zone. Whatever it does take to win the Lions don’t have it. They don’t have the talent or the weapons on either side of the ball. The offense can’t keep the drives toward the end zone going. They can’t capitalize with the big plays when they are needed: with the runs or passes that other teams are able to come up with against us. And there lies the other problem, our Defense. They tire out from being on the field for so long because our Offense can’t string plays together, and they allow the opposing team big plays that result in touchdowns. They fight hard but don’t have the ability to carry the day. Rebuilding since when, Ron Jonas? (1957)

The same can be said in warfare. What does it take to win the battle? An army with a superior number of troops, superior training, and superior weaponry is the one that wins. And as we’ve learned in the recent past, even when an army has superior numbers and power, when they are demoralized defeat can come at the hands of an inferior opponent. Such was the case in Vietnam, in Afghanistan with the Afghan government militia, and in Israel at the time of Gideon.

## **Gideon’s Call**

As our Old Testament Lesson begins there is a power vacuum in Palestine. Egypt, which had been a dominant force in the area has weakened in power and influence. The nation of Israel has become loose confederation of individual tribes that fail to band together to fight off invaders. Because of this, invaders from the southeast-the nation of Midian, along with the Amalekites from the south, and other nomadic tribes from the northeast converge and set up camp in the Jezreel Valley, a little south and west of the Sea of Galilee, in the land that belonged to the tribe of Manasseh. They came at the beginning of the rainy season, when the crops had been planted and were beginning to grow. They would live off the fruit of the Israelites farming, leaving them almost nothing for themselves. Then when the rainy season was over and the crops were decimated, they would move on leaving disaster in their wake, in the same way locusts descend, consume all the crops and then move on leaving nothing.

The people cry out to the LORD, but they do so in an accusatory way that we hear echoed in Gideon's response to the Angel of the LORD in **Judges 6:12-13** <sup>12</sup> **And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."** <sup>13</sup> **And Gideon said to him, "Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."** Gideon's response could be paraphrased as "The LORD is with us? Really? Because pardon my boldness sir but where are all the mighty miraculous acts of salvation that the LORD did for our ancestors when He saved them out of Egypt, at the Red Sea, through the wilderness and giving over control of the Promised Land to us. But now it's as if this land is no longer promised to us. The LORD has forsaken us and is letting our enemies have their way with us.

Before answering their call for salvation, LORD first sends a prophet with words of Law and accusations aimed at them. In response to the people's question "Where is the LORD" the prophet replies with his own question, "Where is your faith?" The LORD through Moses gave you this warning (**Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 17-20**) <sup>11</sup> **"Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today,** <sup>12</sup> **lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them,** <sup>13</sup> **and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied,** <sup>14</sup> **then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,** <sup>17</sup> **Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'** <sup>18</sup> **You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.** <sup>19</sup> **And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.** <sup>20</sup> **Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.** Just as Moses warned them it came to pass: in their comfort, wealth, and ease they forgot who it was that had provided all these blessings and began to think they all came from their own knowledge and ingenuity. They joined in worshipping the gods of the pagan culture that they allowed to live side by side with them. They had turned away from worshipping and obeying the One true God.

As you look at where we are as a nation, how much of our culture around us looks like faithless Israel? How much do we at times look like them? How often do we see all the wealth and comfort that we have as coming from our own hands and ingenuity? How often when trouble arises do we turn to ourselves first, or to the wisdom of man without first looking to the wisdom and word of God? How often do we expect our lives to be like heaven on earth instead of being God's people traveling through the wilderness that is this broken sinful world? How often do we cast sidelong glances at our Heavenly Father and accuse Him of abandonment?

Nonetheless, even though Israel didn't deserve an answer to their calls of distress, the LORD came to give them one. He came to Gideon as the Angel of the LORD. Gideon will later discover that this is no ordinary angel, but it is the LORD God Himself taking on a human like form and appearing before Him. This is the same member of the Trinity that appeared to Moses in the burning bush, appeared above the Tabernacle in the pillar of cloud/flare of fire. This is the preincarnate Christ who come not to judge or punish, but to provide salvation. And how will this happen? **Judges 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."** It will happen because the LORD has come, and He will be with you. He will make it happen.

Now Gideon knows who he is. And by himself he is no mighty man of valor. He knows he is not courageous warrior. **Judges 6:14-16 <sup>14</sup> And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" <sup>15</sup> And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." <sup>16</sup> And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."** Gideon sees himself as he truly is, unworthy and unprepared for this task. But the LORD comes to open Gideon's eyes of faith to see the reality that is beyond what Gideon can see with his physical eyes. The LORD is saying, "Despite what you see and how you feel, you can and will go just as you are and what you have, because the great I AM, the one and only LORD is sending you. And more than that I will be with you. I will fight for you and through you. Through my work you shall defeat this horde of Midian as if you were fighting just one man.

## **The Victory Over Midian Belongs to the LORD**

The LORD has a plan. And the objective is that Israel would be freed from the oppression of the Midianites, and that God alone receive the glory and honor for saving them. He wants the victory clearly to be attributed to Him, partially because it will only be by His might and His supernatural work that it comes about. But He also knows His sinful people. He knows that fear abated can easily turn to self-confidence, self-worship, and a turning away from the LORD God who is their true Savior. So he ensures the victory alone is attributed to Him by choosing such a weak link as Gideon. Then by dismissing in two waves 99% of Gideon's assembled fighting force leaving 300 men to defeat 135,000 Midianites. That's a ratio of 450 to 1. Not very good odds for success, unless the LORD is fighting for you.

The battle plan is ingenious. Normally in warfare at that time you had soldiers whose job was to be torch bearers. A separate contingent would be in charge of blowing the rams horn as the call to battle. Then you would have your soldiers with weapons to do the fighting. The LORD orders Israel to attack “at the beginning of the middle watch”, which would’ve been around 10:00 PM. At that time 1/3 of the Midianite troops would be asleep, 1/3 would be tuckered out from their earlier watch and preparing for bed, and the remainder would have just awoken and were getting into position. The 300 Israelite soldiers are strategically placed surrounding the Midianite camp. The light from their torches hidden by the clay jars. When the signal was given, the unsuspecting Midianites heard the clay jars break, and all of a sudden, the lights of the torches appear surrounding them. To them it would seem that there were a far greater number of soldiers than the 300 hundred. Adding to this was the psychological warfare the LORD had been working on them in the form of dreams. The Midianites are thrown into a confusion so great that they attack and kill one another, and the remainder run for their lives. And so the victory belongs to the LORD. He does work through human agents, but it is His power and might that brings about their salvation.

## **Our Victory Belongs to Jesus**

Fast forward 1100 years to the prophetic word John the Baptist’s father gives in our Gospel Lesson. God’s people are still being ruled over by a foreign power, which is Rome. They are still crying out for deliverance, for salvation. **Luke 1:68-71** <sup>68</sup> **"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people** <sup>69</sup> **and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,** <sup>70</sup> **as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,** <sup>71</sup> **that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.** Zechariah’s son was given the ministry to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord God who was once again coming to visit and save His people. This Savior was the promised Messiah from the house of David, the one prophesied by Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets.

He would raise up a horn of salvation, in other words he would be “strong to save” His people. But who were the enemies He came to save them from? Zechariah’s prophesy states that the goal of this salvation was so that **(Luke 1:74-75)** <sup>74</sup> **that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,** <sup>75</sup> **in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.** Now if this Messiah Savior came only to conquer the Romans, the Jews would still to continue to live in fear of the next world power that would come to dominate the land. They would still be ill-equipped to serve their holy Lord God in their own holiness and would remain to stand outside of the LORD’s righteous favor. That’s why this Messiah would come to take on and conquer enemies much more formidable than the Romans. And that’s why this Messiah had to be Jesus, God in human form.

The Angel of the LORD, the second person of the Trinity, came to set up His human tent among his fallen unrighteous people. God the Son took on humanity so that He could suffer temptation just as we do. In His humanity God the Son took on sin and the devil's temptations in the wilderness directly after His baptism and passed all the tests with flying colors. Then He went on the offensive and took the fight to the devil in his own territory. He went about preaching that God's kingdom was now here, God's reign and rule invading the territory of Satan and winning those called by God back to Him. He did this by His preaching, but also by His casting out demons.

Like Gideon Jesus didn't look like a warrior suited for this formidable task. But His actions proved that assessment wrong. God was not only with Him, but He was God in the flesh. His greatest victory initially looked as unlikely as Israel defeating Midian with 300 hundred troops. Jesus greatest victory consisted of His allowing Himself to be arrested, tried and unjustly found guilty, tortured at the hands of His own people and the Romans, and sentenced to a death reserved for the worst of criminals. But this is how God came to win the greatest battle for all mankind. There on the cross He took all our sin, all our disobedience, all our faithlessness and died to remove it from our record forever. And in exchange, through the gift of faith given in baptism, He gives to you the credit for all the battles He won against sin and the devil. And in the Resurrection gives to you your place at the final victory celebration: Eternal Life.

He did all these things for you and for all men 2000 years ago. But since then the world has grown more dark and more evil. But lest we fall into the faithlessness of the Israelites Christ wants us to know He has not abandoned us. He still comes to us in the Word and the Sacraments. He comes to be truly present, cloaked in the water, cloaked in the bread and wine for our protection. Yet He is truly present to equip us with the same saving power that He gave to all who believed when He walked the earth. His Spirit is present to remind us of and reassure us of this great and wonderful Gospel Truth.

## **Conclusion**

Our world can look pretty dark sometimes, just as dark as it once did for Israel in Gideon's day. We see all that is going on. We hear the Gospel Message but may wonder how it can help us, how can Jesus' death and resurrection so long ago can be the superior saving power that we need. But that's exactly what it is. Christ came to save us from sin, from the devil, and from the place where he will end up, eternal hell. Christ did not come to save this broken sinful world. He did not come so that your life can continue on here in this world forever as you may imagine it should be. He did not come to prevent your inevitable death in this world. That will happen. But when it does, by faith, it is just the door that opens to the New Heaven and New Earth. It will open to a place where all that is wrong around you will never exist again. He will come again on the Last Day to equip you with a new body and soul that can live in this paradise restored forever. And until that time He comes right here and right now, not to make your life perfect, but to keep you in faith unto that eternal life to come. Amen.