

12/5/21 A2 The Voice Declares the Child to be the Prophet of the Most High

- In the Disney animated movie of The Little Mermaid, Ariel, the young mermaid desperately wants to leave the waters of the ocean to become a woman, and experience the life of a human being
 - She is so desperate to leave the waters, that she strikes a deal with the evil sea-witch named Ursula
 - In exchange for making her a human being, Ursula takes Ariel's beautiful voice, and she will only get it back, if without words she gets a human being to fall in love with her – obviously in at least the animated story, this is a daunting challenge that may result in Ariel losing her voice forever
- Now in the story that came before the canticle from Luke that we sang this morning in the place of a Psalm, a very similar, but also very different story unfolded
 - You see once upon a time there was an elderly couple named Elizabeth and Zechariah
 - She was a descendent from the ancient line of the priests in Israel, and he was a priest at that time in the temple in Jerusalem
 - But the big regret in the life of this elderly couple was that they could not have children, and in fact, because of her childlessness Elizabeth felt disgraced by the people around her
 - Then one day, it was Zechariah's turn to go alone into the inner sanctuary of the temple, and offer prayer and incense to the God of Israel
 - But when he went in to the inner sanctuary, Zechariah realized that he was NOT alone, because the angel Gabriel was waiting for him
 - There, in that holiest place of all places, the angel told the priest that in their elder years he and his wife would finally have a son
 - This son would bring joy to them, and he would grow up with the power of the ancient prophet Elijah, and as God's prophet, their son would turn the people of Israel toward God, and prepare the way of the Lord

- Now you would think that if anyone was prepared and ready to hear this good news, it would be a faithful priest in the holiest place, but instead... instead Zechariah asked how this could happen to such an old couple
- And in response to his doubt, Gabriel said: “But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur. [Lk. 1:20]”
- Sure enough, soon Elizabeth was expecting a child, just as Gabriel said, and Zechariah continued speechless
 - Later, when Mary, Elizabeth’s kinswoman visited, having herself also been visited by Gabriel, and this angel also promising Mary in her unmarried youth that she would have a child, the child that Elizabeth was carrying leaped for joy at the presence of Mary and her child
 - The months passed, and finally Elizabeth gave birth
 - The friends and relatives wanted to name him Zechariah after his father, but Zechariah wrote down that his name would be John, and just as God had promised through Gabriel, at that moment Zechariah began to speak
 - And Zechariah didn’t just speak ordinary words of conversation, he didn’t even rejoice that he had received back his voice – instead, Zechariah immediately began to praise God
 - Zechariah praised God because soon the Savior of Israel and the world would be born to Elizabeth’s kinswoman, Mary
 - AND, then the elderly Zechariah looked down on his infant son John, and the priest proclaimed:
 - “And you, child, will be called the
 prophet of the Most High;
 for you will go before the Lord to
 prepare his ways,
 to give knowledge of salvation to his
 people by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn
from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and
in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into
the way of peace. [1:76-79]”

- Zechariah received back his voice as a gift.
- To receive back his voice, it was not a terrible and difficult deal like the one between the sea-witch and Ariel, but simply when the child was born, Zechariah would get back his voice, and all he had to do was wait
- And during those months of quiet waiting for John’s birth, all Zechariah could do was to silently watch and wonder at what God was doing, and at what God had promised, so that *when he could speak*, the words of praise to God, and the words that declared his infant-son’s mission, just came tumbling out of Zechariah’s mouth
 - This child, John, *who WE call* the Baptist, would grow up and use his prophetic voice to bring wayward people back to God
 - AND John, who we call the Baptist, would prepare the way of the Lord, and point to Jesus the Lamb of God when he appeared at the Jordan River and then began his earthly ministry
- Some two thousand years later, we have voices that ALSO can praise and declare
 - We can praise the gift of the prophet-child to Elizabeth, and the Savior-child to Mary
 - We can praise God that an elderly couple, and a young couple, were entrusted by God to raise John and Jesus
 - We can praise God for the grown John the Baptist who back then called, and to this day through the witness of the scriptures continues to call people to turn away from sin and toward God
 - And we can praise God that John prepared the way for Jesus, who as the Lamb of God, took away the sin of the world – in the words of Zechariah, *the one who is the dawn of the new age, the one who brings the light of God into the darkness of our lives, and the one who guides our lives into the way of God’s peace*

- But we can do even more than praise, we can also declare and tell
 - After all, praise alone doesn't share the Good News of what God has done with other people
 - So in addition to praise, we can declare, in fact *we have been commanded* to declare to others, that first John, and then Jesus are not relics of history and that all this was not just a nice story
 - John made a timeless witness to Jesus, and for a world that continually lurches between fear and death, this world and its people desperately need to hear the Good News that Jesus who was crucified is alive, and he alone brings light and life to the world and to its people
 - So with our voices, we can certainly praise God, but we are also called to declare that Jesus Christ is the Savior who has come into the world.