

Psalm 97:12

Advent Midweek 3 • December 20, 2006
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
“Remember”

The Word of the Lord from Psalm 97: “Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.” This is the Word of the Lord.

You must never forget. You must always remember.

You must never forget who you are. Never forget your sinful state, your lack of holiness before God. Of course, if talk of your sinful state and unholiness rankles you, there’s a good chance you already have. Never forget how that Old Adam in you wants to treat God’s promises, distracting you with either annoyance, seduction or affliction until you forget His Word.

You must never forget who God is. Never forget His Word of Law and Gospel, His commandments and His promise to save you for the sake of Jesus. If you forget His faithfulness to you, you’ll look to something else to save, and then you are lost.

You must never forget. You must always remember. True and easy to say. Terribly difficult to keep in practice, no matter the condition of your life. I give you the example of Zacharias, father of John the Baptist.

I. Zacharias Forgets

Zacharias is described as a righteous and blameless man who walks in all the commandments and judgments of God. In other words, he clings to the Lord’s Word, both His Law and the Gospel of the promised Savior. He is a priest, and it is his turn to serve in the Holy Place of the temple, and it’s there that Gabriel appears to him with the news: he and his wife are finally going to have a baby, and they are to name him John. He won’t be just any child: he’ll be the one foretold in Malachi, the Elijah who prepares the way of the Lord (Malachi 4:5-6). The Savior is almost at hand.

There could really be no better news. Zacharias has clung to the promise that the Savior will come some day, and now the angel declares that the time has come. Furthermore, Zacharias has an important part: he’s going to be the forerunner’s father. The promise is coming true!

And how does Zacharias, the righteous and blameless man, respond? He forgets. His mind clouded with arguments about his age and inability to have kids, He forgets that the angel comes from God’s presence and speaks God’s Word to him; and that with God and His Word, all things are possible. He forgets, and so he doubts. He’s going to be the father of the new Elijah? That’s simply impossible.

There's a great irony here: the name Zacharias means "the Lord remembers." The Lord remembers His promise of a Savior, but Zacharias forgets. It's for this reason that Zacharias is sentenced to nearly a year of silence, unable to speak again until John is named according to Gabriel's message. If a priest cannot speak the truth, it's best that he be silent until he can. So for those months, Zacharias can hear and Zacharias can think about what he hears. He can remember the prophets' foretelling the coming Savior. He can remember especially Malachi's words about the one who goes before the Lord to prepare His way. He can ponder the words spoken by Gabriel, the angel who stands in the presence of God. By the grace of God, he remembers God's promises. He writes on the tablet that his son's name is John. And then, by the work of the Holy Spirit, Zacharias sings the song of God's work and his son's part in it. And among the acts of God that he rejoices in is that the Lord "has remembered His holy covenant."

Even if Zacharias forgot for a while, Yahweh has remembered His holy covenant. He's remembered Zacharias, righteous and blameless by the Christ child soon to be born. He remembers you, too.

II. Yahweh Remembers

You must never forget. You must always remember. So our psalm exhorts you to rejoice and remember God's holy name.

You must never forget, and always remember, God's faithful promises. They are for you. He has remembered His holy covenant *for you*. Jesus has become flesh and gone to the cross *for you*. He has conquered death *for you*—risen for you, too. He visits you now in Word and Sacrament, to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith. Do not forget. Always remember. If you forget, big trouble awaits. If you forget God's faithful promises in Christ, your faith has nothing to hold onto.

But it's easy to forget. The next week is an example, for we are fast approaching Christ-Mass, the holyday devoted to celebrating the Incarnation of Jesus. So will your thoughts be on remembering the Word becoming flesh; or whether or not the food cooks correctly, whether or not the gift will be a hit, or how you'll ever conquer the some assembly that is inevitably required? It's not that those things are evil; but they so often and easily obscure the wonder of this greatest gift. Christ is born for you! God has become flesh to save you for eternity!

But the highs and lows, the emotional roller-coaster of the holiday season and its temptations, are really a microcosm of the rest of the year. When times are going well, it is all too easy to forget that good times are extraordinary blessings from God, aberrations in a dying world. Rather than remember these as a foretaste of His blessings of heaven and deliverance from all trouble, we tend to forget the Lord's hand in this at all. That is why, in the midst of good times, it is good to spend time to repent and remember.

Likewise, in bad times, it is easy to be so intimidated by the troubles we face that we forget the Lord is near. Our various, which St. Peter says last only a little while (1 Peter 1:6), are enough to make us wonder if the Lord has forgotten or forsaken us. Bowed

down by worry, we forget His covenant and His promises. We forget to call upon His name, in His name, for help. How easily we forget.

This is another excellent reason for frequent worship and daily Bible reading: distracted by the world and harassed by Old Adam, you're going to find it easy to forget the Lord's Word and promises.

But you must never forget.

But you will.

And this preaches to us again the Law of our sinfulness, how we deserve God's judgment.

But here is the Good News: Yahweh remembers. If we are faithless, He is faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). He who gave His Son to die for the world has put His name on you, personally, in Holy Baptism. He has joined you there to His Son's death and resurrection for the world, and said, "My Son died for you. Therefore I remember you." That is the reason for Christmas: Jesus became flesh so that God might remember you for eternity.

The Lord therefore remembers to call you to repentance. He places His Law into your ears, lest you conveniently forget your sin. He sometimes permits trouble in order to strengthen your faith, even as He permitted those months of silence to Zacharias that he might dwell upon God's promises. But where the Lord permits such trouble and silence, He does so only to remind you of His grace and life, that you may be brought back to remember His promises and sing His praises. And even if you should be brought so low by affliction or disability that you cannot remember your own name, God remembers you. And He will not forget.

Yahweh remembers you. He purposely does not remember your sin. He declares you to be blameless and righteous before Him. Why? It is solely for the sake of the Child born to Mary, become flesh to be crucified for your sins. He is the fulfillment of God's holy covenant to save His people. To save you.

So, "Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name." Rejoice to remember His name that He has put upon you, dear people of God, for by it He declares that you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen