

“Be Born in Us Today: Bringing Power”

Luke 3: 15-17 15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts of John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire 17 His winnowing fork is in His hand to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Exodus 15: 1-6, 13, 18 (After the Exodus from Egypt) 1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: “I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. But horse and driver He has hurled into the sea. 2 “The Lord is my strength and defense; He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him, my father’s God, and I will exalt Him. 3 The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name. 4 Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. 5 The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone. 6 Your right hand, Lord, was majestic (glorious) in power. Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy. ... 13 In Your unfailing love You will lead the people You have redeemed. In Your strength you will guide them to Your holy dwelling. ... 18 The Lord reigns forever and ever.

I have memories of a school bus after a high school football game which our team had won. We rocked the bus with our cheers as we celebrated our victory. And we had to sing. We sang our school song. We had defeated an arch rival, and we were feeling our prowess. We were on top of the world. We shared the twists and turns of the game now ended in victory. We did the chant where one guy starts, “Everywhere we go, (echo) People wanta know (echo) Who we are (echo) So we tell them (echo) We are the East Suns, the mighty mighty East Suns! We won the last game of the season with the best record the East Suns Varsity Football team had ever had. Each of us that night could have sung the words from the chorus of Carrie Underwood’s song, “The Champion”: “I am invincible, unbreakable, unstoppable, unshakeable. They knock me down, I get up again. I am the champion, you’re gon’ know my name.”

Now that’s a story that tells us about one kind of victory song, self-focused or team-focused, which considers all the work put into winning as well as the personal achievement. “I am the champion, you’re gon’ know my name.” Personal and team victories are often accompanied by song. It just seems appropriate to break out in song, “We are the champions, my friend.” **[NOTE 1]**

Arching over the life of every Christian is the great sacred story of the mighty acts of God. This sacred story is highlighted by the displays of power and strength which mark God’s victories over God’s enemies. And with those victories of God are the songs God’s people sang in response. The victory songs of the Bible are not rich with personal bravado or chest-pounding strength. They are not even celebrations of

nations like a national anthem. Rather, these victory songs all celebrate God—who God is and what God does.

[NOTE 2] The very first of these songs to appear in the Bible is our text in Exodus 15. The song is sometimes called “The Song of Moses.” There is another “Song of Moses” in Deuteronomy 34, sung not long before Moses died. Our Jewish friends call this song in Exodus 15, “The Song by the Sea.” That’s exactly where the song was first sung, on dry ground on the other side of the Red Sea. The Israelis had been chased by the Egyptians right up against the sea. Seeing no way out, they had considered surrendering and going back to slavery. In a display of divine power, though, God parted the waters and provided a way out for the Israelis. God’s chosen people walked across the bottom of the sea with towering walls of water on either side. Then God closed the waters on Pharaoh’s army, and the Egyptians perished. Israel had no right to self-praise or have national pride here. Their freedom had depended completely on God’s character and God’s action, God’s mighty power to save.

So there Moses and the people, maybe two million strong, sang their “Song by the Sea,” perhaps written by Moses himself. It is a victory song, but even more, it is a song celebrating the Lord. The focus of the song is the Lord’s amazing power over the forces of nature, the enemies of God’s people, and history itself.

If you have Exodus 15 in front of you, let me give you just a few glimpses of the beauty of “The Song by the Sea.” Notice first that the song is sung to the Lord, that is, to Yahweh, the great I am. That is the name by which Moses knew the Lord from his encounter at the burning bush. Ten times in this song, “the Lord” is used. This is a celebration of who the Lord is and what the Lord does.

Who is the Lord? “The Lord is my strength and song” (v. 2). Who is the Lord? “He has become my salvation” (v. 2). Who is the Lord? “Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power” (v. 6). Who is the Lord? “Majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds” (v. 11). Who is the Lord? “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength” (v. 13). Strength, power, majesty, holiness, glory and steadfast love characterize the Lord! That’s who the Lord is! **[NOTE 3]**

The “Song by the Sea” is a celebration of the character and attributes of the Lord at work in a pivotal moment in our sacred history. What’s more, the song sees the victory of the exodus from Egypt as all God’s doing. What has the Lord done? “I will sing unto the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and rider he has thrown into the sea” (v. 2). “You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters” (v. 10). “You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them” (v. 12).

The last part of the psalm, (verses 13-18) looks ahead to the Lord’s next victories as Israel faces the nations lined up against them—Philistia, Moab, Edom and Canaan. Written in the present tense as if the future is already coming in on them, the Israelites sing of their enemies’ fear and ultimate defeat at the hand of God: “... they are still as a stone, till your people, O Lord, pass by, whom you have purchased” (v. 16). If you’re

counting, the exodus from Egypt gives us three “Passovers” accomplished by God: the Passover of the angel of death, saving Israel’s firstborn; the Passover of Israel on dry ground through the Red Sea; and the Passover of Israel’s enemies as the Lord defeats them in battle. The poetic parallelism is striking. Just as the Egyptians sank “like a stone” (v. 5) so the Canaanites will become still “like a stone” (v. 16).

All of this leads to the confident affirmation in the final verse that “The Lord will reign forever and ever” (v. 18). In the verses that follow, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, sings the chorus of “The Song by the Sea,” accompanied by women dancers and tambourines: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and rider he has thrown into the sea” (v. 21). **[NOTE 4]**

In the great grand sacred story that hovers over our personal stories, the pattern is repeated often. God acts in strength, and God’s people respond with song. Echoing this song is another “song by the sea” at the other end of the Bible in Revelation 15. There John sees “a sea of glass” and calls the song he hears “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (vv 2-3). It is sung by those who have seen God defeat the beast. They sing, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!” (v. 3).

If ever there was a season when we sing victory songs to the Lord, it is this Advent-Christmas season. We hear the ancient songs of Isaiah, the song of Zechariah, the song of the angels over Bethlehem, and the song of Simeon in the temple. Unforgettable is the song of Mary, the mother of our Lord, in Luke 1. The song is called “The Magnificat,” taking its name from Mary’s first words, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” In her song, too, the mighty power of the Lord is celebrated. She sings, “... for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49). For Mary, being chosen by God to give birth miraculously to the promised Messiah was a result of God’s mighty power.

In the great sacred story, God sends his only Son to suffer, die and rise to life again for us. God defeats our ultimate enemies—sin, death and Satan. The Lord rescues us. The Lord frees us. And we sing our hearts out! It’s not enough to talk about God’s power and victory. We have to sing. **[NOTE 5]**

If we look in faith, we will see the mighty acts of God around us, not just in the big sacred story but also in our own personal stories. We face sickness, loneliness and conflict, and the Lord gives us victory. When we are weak, the Lord powerfully lifts us. When we falter, we can still sing, “The Lord is my strength and my song” (Exodus 15:2).

No wonder we sing! No wonder the church sings! Our songs are our witness to the power of God still working wonders among us. I remember hearing of a man in his seventies explain on a New Member Sunday why he had decided to join his new church. He said, “For 40 years I would walk by this church and heard the people inside singing. I listened to them sing about the greatness of their God. I listened to them sing for a very long time. One day, I finally decided to walk in and join their song.” He was welcomed into the church wearing a choir robe. **[NOTE 6]**

There is power in praise. One of the songs that lifted me out of my depression back in 1983 was "Praise the Lord" by the Imperials. The words are powerful. "When you're up against the struggle, that shatters all your dreams. And your hopes have been cruelly crushed, by Satan's manifested schemes. And you feel the urge within you to submit to earthly fear. Don't let the faith you're standing in, seem to disappear. Praise the Lord. He can work through those who praise Him. Praise the Lord, for our God inhabits praise. Praise the Lord. For the chains that seem to bind you, they serve only to remind you, that they drop powerless behind you ...when you praise the Lord."

[NOTE 7] Sing a song of praise to our God. Sing of His greatness! Don't stop making a joyful noise whenever you can. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, chapter 5 and verse 18-20 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery (extreme indulgence in bodily pleasure). Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." So the Holy Spirit inside us, is power. Plug in to that power today!

So we sing, "O holy Child of Bethlehem ... Be born in us today."

Let's pray: Lord, God, heavenly Father, teach us what it looks like to stay focused on You, giving You thanks and praise! Fill us with Your Holy Spirit that we might refuse to focus on the bad and evil in the world and concentrate on You, giving you thanks and praise. Help us to sing and make music from our hearts to You. Lord, it is not easy to give thanks to You for everything. But we know that in Your Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit we can do it. Lord, God may You be born in us today and may people see it and be pointed to you. In Jesus name we pray ... AMEN.

Sermon Notes for “Be Born in Us Today: Bringing Power”
based on Lue 3:15-17 and Exodus 15: 1-6, 13, 18
Given in Doster December 18, 2022

- I. Arching over the life of every Christian is the great sacred story of the mighty acts of God: the Bible. The Bible is filled with displays of power and strength which mark God’s victories over His enemies. These songs of victory celebrate God.
- II. The first victory song in the Bible is found in Exodus 15. Sometimes called, “The Song of Moses” but more accurately, “The Song by the Sea”. The freedom of the Israelites depended completely on God.
- III. The “Song by the Sea” is a celebration of the character and attributes of the Lord. The Lord is powerful and will reign forever!
- IV. This Advent/Christmas season is the perfect time for victory songs. There is the song of Zechariah, (John the Baptist’s father), Mary’s Song called the Magnificat. The gift of God come to earth is victory over death, hell and the evil one.
- V. If we look in faith, we will see the mighty acts of God around us and even when we are weak we can still sing, “The Lord is my strength and my song” (Exodus 15:2). Our songs are our witness to the power of God.
- VI. There is power in praise. People see the strength and power of God within us when we sing in spite of our circumstances.
- VII. What are you going to do about it? How can God use you to illustrate His power and strength this Advent season? Please write out an “I will ...statement”.