The Second Week of Advent - A Reflection on the Prophecy of Zechariah

One of the very interesting prayers of the Book of Luke is the prayer or the prophecy of Zachariah in the Gospel of Luke 1. To understand the background, Zachariah was in silence while he was deaf. When he came out of that silence he broke into a prophetic prayer or word. What is striking to me is that it goes back to what is called “The Shemoneh Esrei”, a prayer in Hebrew that would have been prayed at the time of Zechariah, even during the time of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also called the “Amidah” because one would stand and pray the prayer. It was a prayer that was prayed daily and one of the beautiful things about this is I believe Zechariah was thinking about this prayer that he had no doubt prayed many times at the birth of John the Baptist.

It talks about God's blessing, “Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu veloher avoteinu”, “blessed are you O Lord our God the God of our fathers”. It goes on to describe in the first blessing how the Lord is going to send “a redeemer” and in light of that he is blessed because he is the “magen Avraham” (אַּמְגֶּן בְּרָהָָ֑ם) “the shield of Abraham”. I cannot help but think that the idea of a redeemer is found throughout the New Testament, that Jesus becomes that Redeemer, sent by the Heavenly Father and he is called the Redeemer. In the New Testament we're going to see in the prayer of Zachariah or the prophecy of Zachariah where this is alluded to in this benediction or blessing.

Also, the second prayer (benediction) blesses the Lord because he will remember the dead. This is a very moving prayer, “Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam”, “blessed are You O Lord who resuscitates” or brings to life the dead. I can't help but think that when Jesus makes the statement all who are in the tombs in John 5 “will hear my voice and come forth”. They who have done good into a resurrection of life, they who have done evil unto a resurrection of judgment, and so I believe he's referring to himself as the one who is going to raise the dead someday by the way with two destinies. either a destiny of eternal life or eternal judgment. The work show that we really have salvation which is found in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so Christ fulfills this second benediction. Works don’t save but only show whether salvation is real or not, like smoke in the chimney makes fire in the fireplace.

The third (benediction) talks about a horn that is going to sprout forth and this is in the 15th benediction (Prayer for the Messianic King) where we're told that in the prayer that “qeren wayyaremen” that He is going to raise a horn and this horn is going to bring salvation. I cannot help but feel that Zachariah refers to this when he begins his prophecy by saying “blessed are you God of Israel because you brought Redemption” first of all. Secondly, you've raised a horn of salvation (κέρας σωτηρίας ἡμῶν) “you've raised a horn of salvation for us in the house of David”. Your child and this Savior is going to be introduced by John the Baptist. So I believe all these elements are referred to going back to the 18 benedictions (Amidah - "The Standing Prayer"). Jesus also in the resurrection will become the one who can truly remember the dead for he is indeed the resurrection and the life as well.

Dr. Gary Staats
drstaats.org