

The name, "Joshua," is the anglicized version of the Hebrew name, "Yehoshua." Yehoshua means "Yahweh is salvation." Yahweh is the holy name of God that is not spoken in the Jewish worship, out of reverence. Interestingly, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint (or LXX, for it is believed to have been translated by 70 scholars), translates every instances of "Yehoshua" into "Iesou." "Iesou" is the Greek rendering of the name we are well acquainted with: Jesus.

This brings us into an interesting word play in the text of Luke that we have read today: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." Based upon the meanings of the name, Joshua, the phrase, "salvation of God," could be reverse-translated into the Hebrew name, "Yehoshua," which means "Yahweh is salvation." And if we translate "Yehoshua" into Greek, then it of course becomes "Iesou."

Therefore, the phrase, "salvation of God," and the name, Jesus,

and are rendered to be one and the same: the writer of Luke intended to mean that Jesus is the salvation of God.

To the skeptic, this saying may sound like a coincidence or the personal opinion of the writer of the Luke. The writer makes it clear that was not one of his own saying: this had been prophesied by the prophet Isaiah very long time ago. The coming of Jesus had been prophesied in Isaiah chapter 40: Jesus *is* "Yehoshua" in Hebrew, "Iesou" in Greek, and the salvation of God in English.

And Luke further testifies in his writing that the Word of God came upon John the Baptist who took upon the prophecy of Isaiah, and proclaimed it once more, because the "salvation of God" has been incarnated in his contemporary time—to pitch the tent among the human race. It was no longer an old prophecy: the prophecy of the salvation of God has been fulfilled. Indeed, all flesh shall behold the salvation of God. Thus wrote the writer of the Gospel of Luke with

the full force of the fulfilled prophecy.

**T**hat was the reason why the angel instructed Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, to name Mary's child, “Jesus.” That was the reason why the angel instructed Joseph not to break of engagement with Mary. That was the reason why the angel appeared to the Virgin Mary, announcing that she would have a child!

Luke testifies to his readers that it was all in God's plan of salvation. Luke intended his birth narrative of Jesus not as a cute story to go along with Christmas, but to point the readers to the ancient prophecy—the promise of God's mighty act of salvation—that has been finally fulfilled in the person of the newborn baby.

**F**or most of us that would sound like the end of the story, but it is not. It is only the beginning. Seeing the salvation of God does not mean that one is saved.

Many of us have attended the birthday parties in the past. Some birthday invitations are glad to receive, while other invitations are in conflict with our schedules. We might have been invited to attend, but we may have other important things to do, so we must regretfully decline.

Likewise, God did not make salvation a mandatory event. God's salvation is strictly on invitation basis. The invitation to salvation is issued, but one is not mandated to accept that invitation. In order for us to be saved, we need to respond to the invitation. And that is what John the Baptist preached to the people: God called them to repentance, and they needed to respond to the invitation. Only he put it this way, borrowing from prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

John preached the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The act of repentance is the prerequisite to the forgiveness.

There is the tendency in the modern Christianity to abridge the meaning of salvation. Put simply, the forgiveness of sin is doled out, without the need of repentance. Now people in general understand salvation in this term: “If you died tonight, are you sure you would go to heaven?” If you are not sure about it, then, obviously you need to be saved. So you feel sorry about what you have done, and believe that you are forgiven, and everything is alright.

Then there are others who believe that everyone is saved, regardless. Some would say, if God is love, how can God save some and condemn the rest? To put it concretely, if you had 5 children, would you save only 2 who accepted the invitation and condemn the rest who declined

or postponed? As a parent, it would be an extremely traumatic moment to decide to save only 2 of your children, and leave the other 3 to be condemned for any reason. They certainly have a point.

Nowadays, many people understand salvation as going to heaven. And going to heaven is something that happens after one dies. When Christians talk about heaven, it refers to the kingdom of heaven, and according to Jesus, kingdom of heaven is something that comes to us. We do not go to heaven, but instead, it comes to us. We profess our faith in the kingdom that comes to us. Every time we say the Lord's Prayer, we say, “Thy kingdom *come*, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

To the contrary to what the Christians recite, they have pushed going to heaven far away as an event that takes place after their blissful earthly life is finished. So they talk about it at the funerals and memorial services. But the Bible tells us

that it is not so. The kingdom comes to us while we are still alive. Then what about salvation? When does that happen?

Salvation has more meanings than "moving into heaven." In the Greek translation of the New Testaments, salvation (σωτηρία: [soteria]; σώζω: [sozo], to save) could also mean "to make whole, to heal, to make well, and to preserve." We hear this sentence often when Jesus heals a person: "Your faith has made you well (see Lk. 8:48)." It could also be translated as: "Your faith has saved you."

What this tells us is that the people of the New Testament understood that salvation took place while one was still alive, not after one was deceased. They understood that they began to live out the salvation while they were still alive. Therefore, salvation required their present action, their immediate responses to the invitation, while they were living.

Salvation for Christians means that we are made whole while we are living. We are healed *now* as we live and breathe. Salvation has to do intimately, and primarily, with the present life. Salvation is for *now*!

If we read the text that deals with salvation, it is clearly proclaimed that one needs to repent. The Bible never divorces forgiveness from repentance. Apparently, the people of John's time had difficulty understanding what repentance was. Luke spells it out for them later in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter:

<sup>10</sup> And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

John told them that the response to the invitation to salvation is expressed in the radical modification of one's behavior. For example, horders needed to stop hording, and share with others who had none. Swindlers needed to stop their defrauding, and charge only what was allowed. Robbers needed to stop their acts, and live on what they earned. It is true: if we wanted to be healed of our broken hearts, our wounded spirits, something has to be redressed now. It makes no sense to God or us that one has to wait until one is dead.

In the human society, what breaks our hearts and wounds our spirits is usually found in the various forms of injustice.

Eating sumptuously while many are starving is injustice. Living affluently while the rest of the population suffers from poverty and squalor is injustice. Taking from others by violence, by fraud, by enactment of unjust law, or by abuse of power is injustice.

There are many other forms of injustice that cause great pain

and suffering in life. The Christian salvation is not only connected to the individual holiness, but also linked to the social justice. God does not only call the individuals to salvation, but also calls the society as a whole, a nation as a whole. The whole society, the whole nation need to be cleansed by the corporate repentance. That vision of justice is prophesied in the metaphor of prophet Isaiah:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

As we observe Advent, we look forward to the day, when “justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).” That is the nature of the salvation God intends to give to us through Jesus, our Lord and Savior.