

He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
And exalted those of low degree;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel,
In remembrance of his mercy,
As he spoke to our Fathers,
To Abraham and his posterity forever."

In the BENEDICTUS, Zechariah praises God for keeping His covenant promises to Israel; "As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant." (Lk 1:70-72) Zechariah rejoices that the true Israel will be established just as God had promised through His prophets. But Zechariah also recognizes that the true Israel will not be exactly the same as the old one; in verse 77, he acknowledges that the New Israel will be built upon deliverance from sin: "To give knowledge of salvation to his people, for the forgiveness of their sins." The New Israel will be spiritually renewed in every respect, and this will be a manifestation of the Lord's tender mercy: "Through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace." (vv78-79)

Here also the phrase about giving "light to those who sit in darkness" is probably an allusion to Isaiah 9: "The people who walked in darkness (that is, the Gentiles) have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of deep darkness, on them has the light shined." In short, God will keep His promises to restore the Kingdom of Israel, but it will be a spiritually renewed Israel, and somehow the Gentiles will be brought in as well. All this comes from the "tender mercy" of God. The phrase used here in the Greek original text of St. Luke's Gospel literally means through the "bowels" or "guts" of God's mercy - a phrase that expresses how deep the mercy of God for us really is.

It is clear from the opening Canticles in the first chapters of St. Luke's Gospel, that the Evangelist wants to show us that it is the God of Israel, the God of the Old Testament, the God of Mercy, who is active in the whole story of the "good news of His Son." His mercy is at work as he fulfills His messianic promise to His people and His Mercy is so deep that it reaches out to embrace the Gentiles in order to bring those into the new, renewed Israel.