

The Long Awaited Messiah

Dec 3, 2017

Luke 1:5-26

*5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 **And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.** 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.*

Intro: Today is the first Sunday in what is referred to as "Advent" which is generally 30 days preceding Christmas. For many of us the term Advent is familiar but that is where it stops. As we go through life time has a way of erasing, hiding and forgetting things that should be remembered. It is important to pass along the traditions and meaning to the next generation. Often people grow up and are told some things but never given the complete story, this is one of those situations. My desire is to make sure we understand what we are doing and why we do it.

Advent means "coming" or "arrival." This is all about the celebration of the birth of Jesus at his first "Advent," over 2000 years ago. You will notice four candles on the table, the four candles represent the 400 year period between the prophet Malachi and the birth of Jesus. Each candle represents a century (100 years) each week we light one more as we get closer to the actual day of celebration.

The candles are a nice way of keeping our focus on the upcoming celebration and to build a sense of expectation. We make preparation for any number of things we have to do; and God does the same thing. God has His timing for events and He moves history along at His chosen speed. The preparation of the nation Israel was important because the event was so unusual. It is not everyday the Messiah is born. What we will see in this account is God preparing those who will be important in the overall plan of God. As was often the case there were those who would announce the coming of important dignitaries, people who were of importance. So in this passage we are introduced to Zacharias and his wife Mary, servants of the Lord who were anticipating the coming of the Messiah and would be the instruments God would use to produce the one who would announce the presence of the Messiah to the nation of Israel.

It was a difficult time for the nation of Israel. They were struggling under Roman occupation, the nation was a shadow of it's former glory. There had been no messenger from God for 400 years (what we call the silent period), The people

were restless and looking for a change. The last message came from Malachi when he promised the coming of Elijah (Mal 4:5-6). The spiritual leaders were wrapped up in tradition and, in some instances, corruption; and their king, Herod the Great, was a tyrant He had nine wives, one of whom he had executed for no apparent reason. But no matter how bad things seem, God always has His devoted and obedient people.

T.S. His name was Zacharias

I. He was Faithful (vv. 5-7).

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

1. Zacharias ("**Jehovah has remembered**") and Elizabeth ("**God is my oath**") were a godly couple who loved the Lord and were faithfully serving.

2. The priests were divided into twenty-four courses (1 Chron 24), and each priest served in the temple two weeks out of the year. In spite of the godlessness around them, Zacharias and Elizabeth were faithful to obey the Word of God and live blamelessly.

3. Their only sorrow was that they had no family, and they made this a matter of constant prayer. Little did they know that God would answer their prayers and give them, not a priest, but a prophet! And no ordinary prophet, for their son would announce the coming King!

II. He was Fearful (vv. 8-17).

8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And

he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

1. The priests on duty drew lots to see which ministries they would perform, and Zacharias was chosen to offer incense in the holy place. This was a high honor that was permitted to a priest only once in a lifetime.
2. The incense was offered daily before the morning sacrifice and after the evening sacrifice, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It was probably the evening offering that was assigned to Zacharias.
3. God often speaks to His people and calls them while they are busy doing their daily tasks. Both Moses and David were caring for sheep, and Gideon was threshing wheat. Peter and his partners were mending nets when Jesus called them.
4. You cannot steer a boat while it is sitting still, it has to be moving. When we get busy, God starts to direct us.
5. Luke mentions angels twenty-three times in his Gospel. There are innumerable angels (Rev 5:11), only two of which are actually named in Scripture: Michael (Dan 10:13; Jude 9; Rev 12:7) and Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19,26). When Gabriel appeared by the altar, Zacharias was frightened, for the angel's appearance could have meant God's judgment was about to fall.
6. "**Fear not**" is a **repeated statement** in the Gospel of Luke (1:13,30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7,32). Imagine how excited Zacharias must have been when he heard that he and Elizabeth were to have a son!
7. "Rejoicing" is another key theme in Luke, mentioned at least nineteen times. Good news brings joy!
8. Gabriel instructed him to name his son John ("**Jehovah is gracious**") and to dedicate the boy to God to be a Nazarite all of his life (Num 6:1-21). He would be filled with the Spirit before birth (Luke 1:41) and would be God's prophet to present His Son to the people of Israel (John 1:15-34). God would use John's ministry to turn many people back to the Lord, just as Isaiah had promised (Isa 40:1-5).

III. He was a Skeptic (vv. 18-22).

18 and Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." **19** And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. **20** But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." **21** And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. **22** But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

1. You would think that the presence of an angel and the announcement of God's Word would encourage Zacharias' faith, but they did not. Instead of looking to God by faith, the priest looked at himself and his wife and decided that the birth of a son was impossible.

2. He wanted some assurance beyond the plain word of Gabriel, God's messenger, perhaps a sign from God.

3. This was unbelief, and unbelief is something God does not accept. Zacharias was really questioning God's ability to fulfill His own Word!

Had he forgotten what God did for Abraham and Sarah? (Rom 4:18-25)

"I have made you a father of many nations" in the presence of Him whom he believed — God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; **18** who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be.

4. Did he think that his physical limitations would hinder Almighty God?

5. Faith is blessed, but unbelief is judged; and Zacharias was struck dumb (and possibly deaf, Luke 1:62) until the Word was fulfilled.

Zacharias did not believe; therefore he could not speak. When he left the holy place, he was unable to give the priestly benediction to the people (Num 6:22-27)

*"And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: **23**"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:*

***24**"The LORD bless you and keep you; **25**The LORD make His face shine upon you,*

*And be gracious to you; **26** The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."*

or even tell them what he had seen. Indeed, God had given him a very personal "sign" that he would have to live with for the next nine months.

IV. He was Silenced (vv. 23-25).

23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. 24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

1. Zacharias must have had a difficult time completing his week of ministry, not only because of his handicap, but also because of his excitement. He could hardly wait to return "to the hill country" where he lived, to tell his wife the good news.

God kept His promise and Elizabeth conceived a son in her old age. "There is nothing too hard for the Lord" (Jer 32:17). *'Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You.*

2. Apparently the amazement and curiosity of the people forced her to hide herself even as she praised the Lord for His mercy.

3. Not only was she to have a son, but the birth of her son was evidence that *the Messiah was coming!* These were exciting days indeed!

Conclusion: We should be very encouraged by the events recorded for us in Luke. But, let's not miss the fact that not only did the Messiah come as predicted, but God prepared the way every minor detail as well, nothing was left undone.

John would be the one who would sink down his plow blade into human hearts that were the spiritual equivalent of a parched field whose dirt had long ago hardened to things of God.

Jesus was God's divine Visitor to this world, and John was the one who was sent to prepare the way. Because God knew and John the Baptist knew: that sin was the issue and everyone needed what Jesus was going to do for them, offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. But if people didn't think they had a problem with sin, then the visit of God's Son would be merely annoying and a waste of their time. John did his part and Jesus would do His part that men everywhere would have access to God forgiveness.