



OPENING COMMENT

Advent is a time to anticipate the realities of Christmas: God with us. At times, we can so easily neglect to wonder at the mystery of this event because it has been seeped into our bones over the years, or distorted by cultural consumerism, or mocked as fairytale like. Yet, when we read the story afresh, we can begin to associate with the people of God so desperately waiting for His promises to be fulfilled. Instead of skeptically approaching the season we would do well to see the attitude of the people of God in Luke 1 and gather in anticipation of what God might do.

READ THE TEXT: Luke 1:5-25

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been 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 before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will 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 and he will 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 for the Lord a people prepared."



¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Barrenness was considered to be a curse from God. What then is surprising about how Luke describes Zechariah and his wife?
2. How was Zechariah chosen to represent the people for this act of worship? Why is that significant?
3. What does Zechariah’s initial reaction indicate about his understanding of what was happening?
4. Given the context of Zechariah offering up incense (the prayers of the people), when the angel says “your prayer has been heard” what prayer is he referring to?
5. Luke, in verse 17, connects back to Malachi 4. Why is this significant?
6. Luke indicates that the people knew there was a vision when Zechariah could not speak. Why was this important for the people to recognize? What impact would it have had after waiting for God to act for 400 years?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. The people of Israel had been gathering at the temple in anticipation of what God would do for 400 years. Zechariah and Elizabeth had been seeking God for a child for decades. How might this challenge our disposition to our prayer life? How might it bring encouragement in difficult circumstances?
2. Zechariah still has doubt when faced with an angel that initially caused him to fear. Does this ring true in your own encounters with God? Why or why not?
3. In what ways do you identify with Zechariah, Elizabeth, or the people of God? How does this account encourage or challenge you?
4. Luke takes great pains to link the prophets of the Old Testament with the events in the New Testament. How does this shape how we read the bible?
5. Where are you looking for God to bring the hope of advent to bear in your life?

BIBLICAL THREAD

1. Genesis 17:1 and Kings 9:4 – echo’s of blamelessness to those who are apart of God’s purposes.
2. 1 Samuel 1:11 – Vow of dedication for one dedicated to the Lord.
3. Isaiah 40:1-8 – preparing the way for the Lord.
4. Malachi 3:1-4 – Messenger to prepare the way for the Lord.
5. Malachi 4:1-5 – The great day of the Lord preceded by a new Elijah.



6. Matthew 11:1-19 – Jesus on John the Baptist and him as the answer.

CONCLUSION

The people of God gathered for 400 years praying for the promised Messiah. Zechariah had the awesome privilege of relaying the message of hope to the people, but let his own doubt get in the way. How often we allow our circumstances to cloud our experience of God's fulfilled promises in our lives. This season should be a season of hope; of anticipation of what God will do. Instead of setting our gaze on the hurt, pain, and challenge in our lives let us set our gaze heavenward and seek to experience the grace God has for us this season. We may just end up encountering God himself in a new and lifechanging way.

SHARE & PRAY

LIFE GROUP VISION:

The goal to meeting together around the word of God is three-fold. First, we want to more clearly understand what God is saying to us through his Word and apply it to our own hearts and minds. Secondly, we want to build a loving community with each other to disciple one another toward maturity in Christ. Thirdly, we desire each of us, as ambassadors of Christ, to look outwards to our community and ask how we can bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those whom God has placed in our lives.

