

## ***God Speaks to the Priest***

St. Luke 1:5-25

Zechariah is introduced to us by St. Luke as a priest. As a priest, Zechariah speaks to the people on behalf of God – and he speaks to God on behalf of the people.

He and his wife Elizabeth are from the priestly line of Aaron – they are righteous before God (living by faith) – and they lived by the Word of God (His commandments and statutes a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path).

“But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.” Being childless is not good in Israel – after all – Israel is anxiously waiting for the “Seed of the woman” to come – with each pregnancy, hoping that the Savior promised to Eve would be born.

Zechariah is at work – he’s in the Temple burning incense. It’s the time for prayer – and “the whole multitude of the people were praying outside” the Temple.

The priest offers up incense as he speaks the prayers on behalf of Israel – for the petitions of God’s people are sweet smelling in the nostrils of the Lord. That is to say – the Lord is pleased to hear the prayers which come forth from faith – He loves to hear, and answer, your prayers.

On this particular day, however, Zechariah is shaken by the appearance of an angel of the Lord in the Temple. A messenger, and message, from God! “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard ...”

Did you hear that!?!? Zechariah is busy praying on behalf of all the children of Israel – but it is the prayer of Zechariah and Elizabeth that the Lord has heard – a delightful petition that has come before the Lord.

And what’s His answer to their prayer? “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.”

A son! Parents pray for a child with ten fingers and ten toes – but John will be great – filled with the Holy Spirit – he will turn many to the Lord – he will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah!!!!

You may not have caught what the angel was telling Zechariah, but all of Israel would understand what he is saying. The Lord promised to send one like Elijah to prepare the way for the Messiah. John is the one who prepares the way – who comes in the spirit of Elijah. In other words – the Messiah is coming!!!!!!

“And Zechariah said to the angel, ‘How shall I know this?’” That’s a good, reasonable, question. “I’m old” Zechariah says, and my wife ... well, she’s “advanced” in years (which could literally be translated, my wife “goes before me” in years).

You may be a priest, Zechariah – and you may be old – but “I am Gabriel!” “I stand in the presence of God, and [He] sent me to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 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.”

It is often said that good communication begins with good listening – but what does that mean? Does it mean shutting your mouth – putting in the time – a show of silence as a sign that you are listening (even if you’re just waiting for them to stop talking so you can say something important)?

Or is it a silence that comes from the belief that this person has something valuable to say – that I might need to hear what they are saying? To not just listen, but to hear – their words impacting your life.

Gabriel is not talking about Zechariah’s ears – but his mouth! He doesn’t say “listen up” – but rather – “you will be silent.”

This reminds me of Moses’ words to Israel at the Red Sea when hemmed in by the Egyptian army. “Fear not,” he says, “stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” Stop talking! Stop grumbling! Stop accusing God of evil! Be silent.

Zechariah speaks from unbelief. He may have listened – his ears may have heard what Gabriel had to say – but he did not believe the good news God had spoken to him – and now, he is to be silent until what God has promised has come to pass.

Unbelief is silenced. The priest is silenced. Zechariah cannot talk to the people about God – and he cannot talk to God about the people. And when he comes out of the Temple – the people know something is not right. Rather than a message of good news – or Aaron’s benediction – all they receive from the priest, is silence.

What about you? Do you listen to God’s Word, and then ask – “How shall I know this?” Let me be clear – it’s okay to ask questions of God and His Word – to be curious – even to have doubts, or a lack of understanding --- but unbelief has no place in God’s house.

“This is my body ... this is my blood” doesn’t make sense. You can hear – “I forgive you all your sins” – and still not feel forgiven. You may hear God’s Word about the hot topics like gender and sexuality – or the classic issues of “wine, women, and song” (what the Bible teaches about the Lord’s Supper, women preachers, and worship) --- and find yourself asking, “How shall I know this?”

As we will see next week, Mary asks a similar question – the difference being – Zechariah does not believe the Word that God has spoken to him. His reason gets in the way. He gets in the way – listening to, and believing, what he thinks is true!

God sends His messengers, His message, His good news to you today – and with that Word, God the Holy Spirit is at work to create a faith that trusts that Word of God.

“Do not resist the Holy Spirit,” is the Bible’s warning. And “do not be afraid” when God’s Word troubles you. Rather, pray that the Holy Spirit could give you wisdom – that He would enlighten you. Pray that the Holy Spirit would keep you from unbelief, that He would lead you in the way of faith.

Dearly beloved, God's Word does what it says – it did for Zechariah and Elizabeth – and it does for you today. The priest goes home and does what husbands and wives are given to do – and Elizabeth conceived – just as the Lord had promised.

Their child is to be named John. You know him as John the Baptist. He is the Elijah that the Lord promises to send before the Messiah – to prepare His way – and to prepare hearts, giving ears to hear God's Word, and by the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus and be saved.

God bless you this Advent Season – hearing the good news of your Savior, Jesus Christ – who comes to make you righteous in God's eyes and to give you the salvation He has earned for you on Calvary.

May the good news of Jesus your Savior break the silence – so that you may rejoice and give thanks – to have joy and gladness with believing Zechariah and Elizabeth, and all of God's children. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.