

The Wonder of a Coming Savior

The Sub-Plot of Zechariah, Elizabeth and John the Baptist

December 13, 2015

DAY 1: John the Baptist's parents: Zechariah and Elizabeth

1. The coming of the Messiah had been prophesied since the third chapter of Genesis. In addition, a forerunner to the Messiah was also prophesied, most notably in the book of Malachi, some four hundred years before Jesus Christ came.

2. Zechariah was a priest serving in the temple in Jerusalem. He was married to Elizabeth. Both were aged and had no children.

Luke 1:8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

*Luke 1:11 Then an **angel of the Lord** appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.*

3. When people think of angels bringing messages they usually think of some "sweet" angelic presence fluttering in. But this was not the case. What does Zechariah's response tell you about the "angel of the Lord?"

4. This is a terrifically significant event. God has broken into history, from the invisible to the visible. Here is the message.

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John."¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.

5. Underline everything the angel of the Lord says about John, the son to be born.

6. What strikes you the most from the angel's message about John?

7. This story is one of five that bridge the four hundred year gap between Malachi and the coming of the Messiah. What you've read today are prophetic words that will be tested shortly by an aged and barren couple. Would Elizabeth get pregnant against all odds? Would she have a son? As John became an adult, would he have the kind of ministerial effect the angel predicted? Our faith does not rest on "hope so's." It rests partly on prophetic words that are verifiable historically. What is your biggest take away from today's devotional?

DAY 2: God makes Zechariah's life harder to drive home the reality of God's work

1. We pick up on the angel of the Lord's message to Zechariah regarding the son to be born.

Luke 1:17 "And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

2. The son to be born will be no ordinary man. Underline the significance of John.

Luke 1:18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

3. Though Zechariah was a priest, and though he had been physically visited by an angel of the Lord, he found it difficult to believe that Elizabeth could get pregnant at their advanced ages.

4. When we doubt God, how can God respond in a way that makes it clear that *God* is at work, and not just the simple laws of life? Sometimes He makes our life harder, and in that hardship we realize that the plan of God is moving forward! This is what happens to Zechariah.

Luke 1:19 The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

²⁰ *And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."*

5. The weight, the significance, and the meaning of this prophetic event would not be understood by Zechariah unless some type of sign would make it "obvious" that a miracle had indeed taken place. Even Zechariah's doubts are redeemed by God, to drive home the unfolding of God's great plan of redemption.

6. The prophetic words of the angel of the Lord can be verified personally and historically. What does the angel of the Lord predict will happen to Zechariah? (v. 20)

7. In your past, has God made your life harder in order to drive home the reality of who He is?

DAY 3: Prophecy fulfilled, part 1: Elizabeth becomes pregnant; John is born.

Luke 1:21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

²² *When he came out, **he could not speak** to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.*

1. That first part of the prophecy has already begun. There were a group of people waiting for Zechariah to finish his temple duties. When he emerged what two things did they come to conclude?

2. Zechariah finishes his week of temple service and returns home.

Luke 1:24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

²⁵ *"The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."*

3. Elizabeth does indeed become pregnant, even in her advanced years. Zechariah had communicated with her, through writing, about his experience at the temple, the message he received from the angel of the Lord, which was corroborated by his inability to talk. What conclusion does Elizabeth draw from all these experiences?

Luke 1:57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

⁵⁸ *Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.*

⁵⁹ *On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,*

⁶⁰ *but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."*

4. At the birth of their son, what did the neighbors conclude?

5. It was common in the culture to name the first born son after their father. That is what Elizabeth *had* wanted to do. But when it came time to name their son, what did she say?

6. Imagine yourself to be Elizabeth. What events do you think convinced her that God's plan was moving forward, even against tremendous odds? What would have convinced you?

DAY 4: God's story unfolds.

Luke 1:61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

⁶² *Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.*

⁶³ *He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "**His name is John.**"*

1. What is the significance of Zechariah's choice of name, especially in light of the usual cultural practice?

Luke 1:64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.

2. What reasons do you think prompted Zechariah to erupt in verbal praise to God?

3. What do you think he realized about God's plan, and the plan for John's life?

Luke 1:65 The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.

⁶⁶ *Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.*

4. What conclusions do the people who know Zechariah and Elizabeth the best draw about these events?

*Luke 1:67 His father Zechariah was **filled with the Holy Spirit** and **prophesied**:*

⁶⁸ ***"Praise** be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.*

⁶⁹ ***He has raised up a horn of salvation** for us in the house of his servant David*

⁷⁰ *(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),*

⁷¹ *salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us--*

5. Zechariah erupts in praise. Zechariah realizes that the long story of God is continuing, right in front of him! God is redeeming His people (v. 68), and that salvation is coming (v. 69).

6. What strikes you about God's story?

DAY 5: Salvation coming, verified by prophecy and historical events

1. Zechariah continues his praise of God. He realizes that the story of God, which began all the way back in Genesis is unfolding today. He remembers God's covenant and the promises God made to Abraham, as well as the mercy shown to God people, over and over again (v. 72).

Luke 1:72 ... to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ *the oath he **swore to our father Abraham**:*

⁷⁴ *to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear*

⁷⁵ *in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

2. Then, Zechariah remembers that God has made promises about his son.

Luke 1:76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

3. What roles will John play in God's great plan? (v. 76)

Luke 1:77 ... to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ *because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven*

⁷⁹ *to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."*

4. The message of salvation is coming. List every particular regarding the importance and nature of salvation.

5. At least twenty years pass between v. 79 and v. 80.

Luke 1:80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

6. The prophetic word spoken to Zechariah and confirmed continued to unfold, just as the angel of the Lord predicted.

7. The breaking into history, the prophetic words, and the historical events verified all serve to verify the meaning of this story--the coming salvation.

8. What struck you most about Zechariah's story?