

ADVENT SERVICES
December 4, 2018
A Study of Luke 1:5-25

Verse 5

Introduction of the main characters in our story

- King Herod came to power around 37-34 BC
- Zechariah is from the priestly order of Abijah (a descendant of Aaron) (1 Chronicles 24)
- Elizabeth is a descendant of Aaron as well

Herod received funds for his extravagant building programs mainly from the Jewish people. For his own political purposes he controlled the temple and the appointment of the high priest. During the process of the consolidation of the Jews to Roman rule, Herod was a tyrant. In contrast Zechariah and Elizabeth are exemplary.

Verses 6 and 7

Both are descendants of Aaron and both lived their lives according to the will of God. But Luke wants us to enter into the pain and shame of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Elizabeth is barren and both she and her husband are too old to bear children. Zechariah cannot make Elizabeth pregnant so for her to have a child she cannot depend on him. Her situation is impossible apart from a miraculous intervention. And that is exactly what happens!

Verses 8-11

All the attention centers on Zechariah. It was customary for the daily tasks of the priesthood to be allocated by casting lots. Casting of lots was a way of circumventing the human will. Already Luke is alerting us that God is at work, that God has chosen Zechariah for this honor. Offering of incense would bring Zechariah as close to the presence of God as any could come. Luke continues to emphasize Zechariah's presence in the sanctuary. An angel appeared at the right side of the altar (the place of honor). This is holy space!!! Temple is a place where God speaks. When the angel speaks it will be as if God spoke to him. Prayer is the context by which the purpose of God is made known.

Verses 12 and 13

Do not be afraid communicates the certainty of God's care. Encounter is to bring comfort and good news (not judgment). Prayer of Zechariah has been heard and a son is promised. The words of the angel echo the promise made to Abram in Genesis 15:1. Both men were not forgotten. And we have to remember that while Zechariah is in the temple the people are outside praying. Through divine intervention both stories are brought together explicitly. By acting on behalf of Zechariah and Elizabeth, God is acting on behalf of Israel. For now the birth of a son is proof that the Lord has shown great mercy. His name will be John which means *God is gracious*.

Verses 14-17

John will be important to his parents, then to many, and finally in the sight of the Lord. Joy becomes a dominant feature of the birth narratives.

These are not ordinary births but of eschatological importance (mark the coming of salvation).

Need to refrain from wine and beer was associated with separation from a normal life.

John will have a divine task and instead he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Luke highlights his role as a prophet who will call the people of Israel to repentance.

John will turn Israel to its Lord.

John will go before the Lord because this is God's story.

John will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children (Malachi 4:6).

For now the promise revolves around the direct intervention of the Lord God himself.

Period of waiting is drawing to a close and God is on the move.

Final preparations are necessary and John will have the central, prophetic role.

Verses 18-20

Message of the angel is incredulous and Zechariah doubts.

Now the anonymous angel provides his name and his credentials.

He is Gabriel who in Daniel 8-9 was trusted by God to reveal divine mysteries.

Gabriel stands as the presence of God, a leading angel, and God's personal servant.

His words must be accepted for he speaks with God's own voice.

Love this part – Zechariah wanted a sign (the proof he requested).

Sign given to Zechariah is both certification and punishment for his unbelief.

Even his silence will be used for God's purpose for it will illuminate the naming of the child.

In the interim his silence will guard the news of God's unfolding purpose until the right time.

Verses 21-25

Eventually Zechariah leaves the temple and encounters all the people waiting for him.

People witness his inability to speak and recognize that he saw a vision in the temple.

Elizabeth (unlike her husband) accepts God's intervention on her behalf.

Especially in Luke, a woman is a recipient of God's favor and a model of faithfulness.

The larger story of how God will intervene to create a faithful people continues.

Elizabeth will remain in her home so as not to continue to suffer public disgrace.

After five months her pregnancy would be apparent to all.