

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Luke 1:5-25

December 2, 2007 Sunday a.m.

INTRODUCTION

- A. Are you ready for Christmas?
 - 1. Not talking about tree or decorations.
 - 2. Are you ready spiritually for Christmas.
- B. Luke 1:5-25 is the story of a husband and wife who got ready for Christmas in their own ways.

I. WHO WERE THEY?

- A. They were believers. How do we know?
 - 1. First, they were both descendants of priests (PK's)-**v.5**.
 - 2. Second, they were both practicing believers-**v.6** (Church every Sunday).
- B. They were not only believers, though, they were two people with needs. What needs?
 - 1. Their biggest need was for children-**v.7a**. According to first century biology this was the wife's fault.
 - 2. Now they were beyond child bearing age-**v.7b**.
- C. We probably have our own needs today.
 - 1. May not be for children. May be just the opposite-children in rebellion, trouble, or hurting.
 - 2. Maybe we battle some addiction or health issue every day.
 - 3. Maybe we are divorced or lost our job.
 - 4. Let's read on in our story.

II. HOW DID THEY RESPOND TO THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT?

- A. The husband went back to work. Just like a man isn't it?
 - 1. What was his work? Like most priests, he was probably a farmer by occupation and a part time priest.
 - 2. Verses 8-10 tell us he had a chance of a lifetime to minister in the Temple, something very few priests ever had the chance to do—**vv.8-10**.
 - 3. His day got even bigger when an angel appeared to give him a personal message—**vv.11-14**.
- B. The angel told him his prayer had been answered.-**v.13**.
 - 1. What prayer?
 - 2. It must have been his prayer for a child. But he had probably long since forgotten it.
 - 3. He had given up on God answering his prayer, but God hadn't given up.
 - 4. Is there a prayer you have given up on? God hasn't forgotten it. But remember, he answers in his own time, not ours.
- C. The angel told him his other prayer had been answered too-**vv.15-17**.
 - 1. What prayer was this? As a Jew who practiced his religion, no doubt he often prayed for the Messiah to come.
 - 2. God's answer was Jesus. He is our answer too.

III. WHAT KIND OF FAITH DID THIS COUPLE DISPLAY?

- A. Zechariah's faith was lacking-**v.18**.
 - 1. He thought his prayer for a child was past the statute of limitation on his body.
 - 2. He, like many of us would do, asked for a sign.
 - 3. His reaction reminds us that underestimating God is just as bad as rebelling against God. Have we done this too?
- B. The angel gave him more proof than he bargained for-**vv.19-22**.

1. As if seeing an angel isn't scary enough, imagine seeing one you just ticked off. That's what Zechariah did.
 2. After all, this was no ordinary run of the mill angel. This was Gabriel.
 3. Gabriel pointed the remote control at Zechariah and hit the mute button.
 4. The lesson for us here is that even practicing Christians don't always respond with faith when God tries to stretch it.
- C. Elizabeth's response, however, was much different than her husbands.
1. First, she secluded herself-**vv.23-25**. Maybe she was embarrassed or afraid she might lose the child.
 2. She then praised God for answering their prayer-**v.25**.

CONCLUSION

- A. This couple's story reminds us that regardless of how spiritual we are there is still room for our faith to grow.
- B. James Dobson story-following....

James Dobson relates a story of an elderly woman named Stella Thornhope who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband had died just a few months prior because of a slow-developing cancer. Now, several days before Christmas, she was almost snowed in by a brutal weather system. She felt terribly alone, so much so that she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas. Late that afternoon, the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box.

He said, "Mrs. Thornhope?" She nodded. He said, "Would you sign here?" She invited him to step inside and closed the door to get away from the cold. She signed the paper and said, "What's in the box?" The young man laughed and opened up the flap, and inside was a little puppy, a golden labrador retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, "This is for you, ma'am. He's 6-weeks-old and completely housebroken." The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity.

"Who sent this?" Mrs. Thornhope asked.

The young man set the animal down, handed her an envelope, and said: "It's all explained here in this envelope, Ma'am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift for you." The young man then handed her a book, *How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever*.

In desperation, she again asked, "Who sent me this puppy?"

As the young man turned to leave, he said, "Your husband, Ma'am. Merry Christmas."

She opened up the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement and admonishments to be strong. He vowed that he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He had sent her this young animal to keep her company until then. She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then, remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up that golden, furry ball and held it to her neck. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the neighbor's house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen the strains of "Joy to the World, the Lord has Come."

Suddenly, Stella felt the most amazing sensation of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and wonder greater than the grief and loneliness. "Little fella," she said to the dog, "it's just you and me. But you know what? There's a box down in the basement I'll bet you'll like. It's got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and some lights that are going to impress you. And there's a manger scene down there. Let's go get it."

God has a way of sending a signal of hope to remind us life is stronger than death. Light is more powerful than darkness. God is more powerful than Satan. Good will overcome evil. Joy is stronger than disappointment. That's the message of Christmas. The question is, are we prepared for it? Are we able to believe that God is acting for us in ways we never could have imagined to take away our disgrace and disappointment?