

Joy of Every Longing Heart—Baby John Before Baby Jesus

December 1st, 2019

Scripture: Luke 1.1-22

Luke 1.1-22 (NIV)

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

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.

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. 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 call him 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 before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

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."

¹⁹ The angel said to him, "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 appointed time."

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.

Malachi 4.5-6 (NIV)

See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. Malachi 4.6 He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.

Read and Discuss

Introduction

Pastor Jacob began our series leading up to Christmas. This season is called Advent which is a season of waiting in great expectation. In this season, we sense the longing within our own hearts for God to show up and prove to be our rescuer. This first message of Advent highlighted the role of

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John the Baptist's parents in the story of Jesus coming into the world. Their faithfulness in listening to God through a quiet season led them to be available to God's plan.

Engage the Scripture

- We identified that Advent is a season of waiting. Jacob pointed out that God's people had been waiting for 400 years to hear from God. It was as if God had stopped talking for some time. Have you ever felt that God has been silent? What do you do when you are waiting for God? What do you do when things seem the darkest?
- Read Malachi 4.5-6. The last time they had heard from God was in Malachi 400 years earlier. Compare these words to the words of the angel to Zechariah in Luke 1.16-17. What stories from the past give you hope for the present and for the future?
- Read Luke 1.1-22. What can you learn about Zechariah and Elizabeth through this passage?

The name Zechariah means "The Lord remembers". Elizabeth means "The Lord keeps his promises". Those two claims about God had been uttered many times every day in the life of this couple. Their home would have been ringing with promises that God is with them even if they felt alone when they could not have children or when he wasn't asked to enter the temple. What reminders do you have that God has not left you alone?

- John thought that his special assignment was to enter into the temple and burn incense, offering the prayers of the people up to God. But in the midst of a time where God has seemed to be quiet, Zechariah heard from God's angel. The angel gave him a new assignment. How would you describe his new assignment from God? Have you ever felt as sense of calling to do something or follow a certain path in life? Do you resonate with the doubt, the waiting, the inability to talk, the culmination of using your voice after a time of silence?

Pray

Make this verse of the hymn from Charles Wesley your prayer:

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.*