

PP Zechariah's Christmas Adventure

Text **Luke 1:5-17**

11/26-27/2016

PP 'Advent' comes from Latin *adventus* meaning the arrival of a notable person, thing or event
Churches all over the world begin today to celebrate the Advent, the coming of Jesus Christ,
beginning each year 4 Sundays before Christmas

But have you ever noticed, that the word advent forms the root for our word 'adventure'?

PP 'Adventure' comes from Latin *adventurus* and means something that is about to happen
This sermon series is about four adventures that 3 people and 1 group of people experienced,
brought about by angelic visits, that prepared them for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus
Christ

Today we'll look at the first one, centering on a humble country Priest named Zechariah

PP It was a dark and hopeless time, and Luke begins: ***'In the days of Herod, king of Judea'*** 5a
This was Herod the Great, a brilliant but wicked king despised by the Jewish people
He was an Edomite, and they were descended from Esau, cursed by God, called half-Jews
Rome's strategy was to conquer and then install in power one who would be loyal to Roman rule
Rome liked Herod which gave him a lot of latitude, because he was loyal and a brilliant strategist
But Augustus, Emperor of Rome once said, *"It is better to be Herod's hog than to be his son!"*
Herod was a ruthless protector of his throne, even having three of his own sons killed
He had Israel's high priest, Aristobulus, drowned, who happened to be his wife's brother
And to silence her-his favorite of 10 wives-he had her killed, and then her mother in law
On his deathbed, he ordered that the distinguished citizens of Jerusalem be rounded up and killed
upon his death, so that there would be sufficient mourning at the time of his funeral
Thankfully, the order was never carried out when he died
His worst murderous act was his order to kill all the male infants in Bethlehem to protect his
throne from the prophesied birth of the king of the Jews
It was a dark time in Israel and the contrast to Zechariah couldn't be more stark

'In the days of Herod, king of Judea was a priest named Zechariah'

PP 'Zechariah' was a common priestly name that meant *the Lord has remembered*
What an appropriate name, for there had been no record of God's revelation for nearly 483 years
Zechariah was one of about 20,000 priests who served at the Temple of God
He wasn't part of the corrupt, wealthy priestly aristocracy, he was a common country priest
Every direct male descendant of Israel's first High Priest Aaron was eligible to be a priest
Not only was Zechariah descended from Aaron, his wife Elizabeth was as well
And Luke gives us a brief biographical sketch of them

PP i. They were a godly couple: ***"And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord."*** 1:6

PP ii. They were a childless couple: ***'they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren'*** 1:6
In biblical days more even than today, it was crushingly painful to be unable to have children
For a woman to be unable to have children, she was looked at as being cursed by God
Leah, the wife of Jacob called barrenness a '***misery***' and Hannah wept bitterly over the condition
Rabbis made it infinitely worse, teaching that '*A Jew who has no wife, or a Jew who has a wife and who has no child*' was not welcome in God's presence
Barrenness was actually legal grounds in Jewish courts to divorce
Adding to this, Luke tells us the cause of the barrenness was Elizabeth

PP iii. They were an elderly couple: *‘both were advanced in years.’* 1:7

But God would remember, as Zechariah’s name means, and He would keep His promise and

PP how beautiful that *‘Elizabeth’* means *the absolutely reliable God*

“Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.” 8-9

The 20,000 priests were divided into 24 divisions about 1,000 each and each division served one week in the Temple, twice a year

They prepared the sacrifices, served as guards, inspectors, janitors, singers and musicians

56 priests were chosen each daily to oversee the offerings: a burnt offering made morning and evening for Israel where a one-year-old spotless lamb would be sacrificed along with an offering of flour and oil, and a drink offering of wine

Before the morning sacrifice and after the evening sacrifice incense was burned on the altar to symbolize the sacrifices going up before the Lord with sweetness

The priest who would do this was selected from the division on duty, and could only do this once in his lifetime and many priests never had this privilege, but it was their greatest desire

On this day, the lot fell on Zechariah for the first time in his life

In the temple there was the Court of the Gentiles, then as a Jew moved inward there was the court of Women, then inward from there the Court of the Israelites

That court contained the Court of Priests where the altar for the burnt offering was

Zechariah would have taken the live coals from the burnt offering and placed them in a golden bowl and walked them into the temple itself

The temple was divided into two parts, the holy place and the holy of holies, the latter being where only the High Priest could go once a year on the Day of Atonement to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat

Zechariah would go no further than the Holy Place, to the center of the far end where he dumped the coals into the golden altar of incense

Before him rose the thick curtain embroidered with Cherubim woven in scarlet, blue, purple gold

Facing the curtain, on his left was the table of showbread, on his right the golden candlestick

Zechariah would have then purified the altar and afterwards spread the incense on top of those burning coals so that immediately a huge column of smoke would rise up carrying the fragrance of the incense up through the temple representing the prayers of God’s people

Normally he would then exit the holy place and at the rail of the Priest’s court he would bless the people who *‘were praying outside at the hour of incense.’* 10

But something happened when Zechariah entered the Holy Place

“And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.” 11-12

PP *‘troubled’* is a Greek verb that means startled, like jumping out of your sandals startled

PP *‘fear fell upon him’* is not anxiety or worry fear...terror

A better translation is that terror seized him in its grip, he was scared out of his mind

And why wouldn’t he be?

This was Gabriel, the last angel of God to appear in the OT, the first in the NT

No priest as far back as any could remember had seen an angel, or heard from God

It had been nearly 500 years since an angel of God had appeared to any person

Angels appearing just didn't happen anymore, but it did that day
 How beautiful that even the position of Gabriel is preserved for us, *'right side of the altar'*
 It was the side of favor and blessing, which makes **Romans 8:34** so comforting: *"Who is to
 PP condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is
 at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."*

Gabriel said to him: *"Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your
 wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."* 13

Zechariah had prayed a long time for a son who would take away the reproach of barrenness
*Zechariah, your prayers have risen to God like the incense in this altar and He has heard you
 and He is going to grant you your prayer*

"And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth" 1:14

Let's return to how we began the sermon, with the words advent and adventure

PP Recall that *'advent'* means coming or arrival of a notable person, event or thing

PP It's related word *'adventure'* means something that is about to happen

What is about to happen, is a second advent, a second coming of Christ, He Himself says so

PP The next to last verse in the entire bible Jesus says, *"He who testifies to these things says,
 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"* Revelation 22:20

I would suggest that you and I, Christian brother and sister, have the same mission as John
 What was that mission?

*'he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in
 the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the
 disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.'* 1:16-17

Christians, it is our time to do the same, and Christmas is a time to remember that and Gabriel's
 message to Zechariah is an opportunity to recall how we can do that

PP 1-We must be people of faith!

We can impact the unbelieving world, as well as the church by our faith

But being a Christian does not mean that we are full of faith, even those of us saved a long time
*"And Zechariah said to the angel, 'How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife
 is advanced in years.' And the angel answered him, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of
 God, and I was sent 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.'" 1:18-20*

The throng of worshipers were outside in the courts waiting for blessing of priest who pours out
 the incense, but they would hear no blessing that evening

Verse 62 indicates that not only could he not speak, he could hear

God shut him up and shut him off

Why? Gabriel told him why: *'because you did not believe my words.'*

Zechariah's faith must be strengthened

John must grow up in a family where the parents model great faith, he is the herald of the Savior

Parents, our children must see us living out a growing, strengthening faith in our God

The world must see God's people trusting Him in all circumstances!

And the way our faith grows is exactly what Gabriel said...we must believe in God's word!
Take Him at His Word, and trust Him...study the Scriptures, learn them, trust them, obey them
Zechariah learned a valuable lesson, and God would be merciful to him

“And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, ‘No; he shall be called John.’ And [Zechariah] asked for a writing tablet and wrote, ‘His name is John.’...And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea...” 1:59, 63-66

PP 2-We must get people ready to receive Jesus

Gabriel told Zechariah in the Holy Place, his son ***“And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”*** Luke 1:16-17

Later, Zechariah's voice was restored, he prophesied about his son, ***“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,”***
1:76-77

John wasn't the Messiah; he was the forerunner or herald whose mission was to announce the advent, or the coming of the King of kings and prepare the way for Him

It was to get the people ready for the King's arrival

You see, when a king was about to go on a tour or political trip, a *forerunner*, or courier would be sent out to tell the people to prepare the roads for his trip

The herald, or forerunner would take a work crew, and clear the roads, repair them or even build a new road if necessary

John was the forerunner to the King of Kings, Jesus Christ, but the preparation he gave was to repair hearts and lives to the king

And he prepared them, using two methods: *preaching* and *baptism*

He preached the same theme in all his sermons: ***‘Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand’***

The king is coming and He is establishing His kingdom, and if you don't want to be on the outside looking in, you must repent

And he baptized them, which was a sign that demonstrated the person's repentance

Our adventure is no different and Jesus makes that clear as He gives all Christians one mission

PP ***“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** Matthew 28:18-20

I have time to offer one more way to serve like John the Baptist

PP 3-We must be different than the unbeliever's

Gabriel said of John to his father, ***‘he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.’*** **1:15**

Then Gabriel said, ***‘he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah’*** **1:17**

Meaning he will be full of courage and refuse to compromise to the world

Look down at verse 80 and read how that little baby began to grow: ***“And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”*** **1:80**

He separated himself from worldly living, he devoted himself to God and became strong in his faith

We will not influence this unbelieving world if we live like the world does

We grow in spiritual disciplines, we say no to activities that the world says yes to, we refuse that which can defile us, and we pursue God

The great evangelist DL Moody repeated the words Henry Varley once said to him:

PP ***“The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him. By God’s help, I aim to be that man.”***

This Christmas, live an *adventurous* life, like Zechariah, Elizabeth, and their son John did

Be a Christian of great faith

Get people ready to receive Jesus

Live different from the world

Amen?

Pray