

# Women of Advent | Elizabeth

## Luke 1

We are excited because this Sunday marks the beginning of the season we call Advent. The word 'advent', means 'arrival' and in the church, it is the four-week period of time that we set aside to prepare to celebrate the first arrival of Jesus in His Incarnation, and to remember that we are still in a period of waiting for His second arrival to consummate and establish His earthly kingdom forever.

Jesus' Incarnation was a signal to the world that God's plan of redemption was coming to its ultimate fulfillment, that the plans which the Triune Godhead established from before the foundation of the world, were being completed. Jesus' Incarnation as a baby showed us the lengths that He would go to save His people and to be their righteousness. It affirms the dignity and worth of human life. Jesus' Incarnation ought to inspire us to live our lives here and now to the fullest, because in some way His Incarnation teaches us that all that we have has been given to us as a gift, and is holy before God.

The incarnation teaches us that all of life is gift. We do not truly earn or deserve anything we have, yet God is gracious to give us all that we need and to find our desires rightly ordered and found in Him.

There are four traditional themes that the church focuses on during these four weeks leading up to Christmas:

- Prophet Candle of Hope
- Bethlehem Candle of Humility
- Shepherd's Candle of Joy
- Angel's Candle of Peace

This Sunday we are starting off by lighting the prophet candle of Hope.

The first candle symbolizes hope. It is sometimes called the Prophecy Candle in remembrance of the prophets, especially Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ. It represents the expectation felt in anticipation of the coming Messiah. As we will see in a few minutes, Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecies of the Messiah, redeeming His people from their sin. Like the OT prophets of old, we wait in expectation of His second coming when He will consummate His earthly kingdom forever. His first appearance He came as a servant, saving His people from the penalty and power of sin, in His second coming He will appear as the conquering Lord of all, the true High King over all kings. We continue to hold fast to and pass on the message of hope to the world.

This year our focus for the season of Advent will be on the women of Advent. Because the Nativity stories are so familiar to us, it can sometimes be helpful to have a lens by which we re-tell the story of our Lord's birth and arrival. Over the years we have done many different kinds of lenses, and this year we will be using the women of Advent as the loci of focus for us.

- Elizabeth
- Mary
- Anna
- Women of Jesus

## **Luke 1:5-7**

*In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

## **Hope Received**

The people of Israel felt barren, like Elizabeth, for God's voice had been absent for a long time. This is the case for God's people at the time when John the Baptist is born. Israel was in a period of darkness and seeming emptiness due to the silence of God for 400 years. The last time that God spoke to His people was through the prophet Malachi, and in that time God prophesied that the next time He speaks it will be through Himself coming to His people. The prophecy of Malachi was a scathing rebuke to the people of Israel for turning away from the right worship of God back to idol, as well as a rebuke of the leaders of the people leading them astray. In His final warning to the people of Israel, His call is against o repent and turn their hearts back to Him. Yet, He also gives the promise of His own arrival on the scene again.

Thus, the people were waiting with great anticipation for the arrival of the Messiah Himself, awaiting the arrival of the Prophet who would prepare the way before the coming of the LORD.

The root of Hope was still there for Israel, for they had the written prophecy of God to hold on to and to let guide them in their lives. Thus, the first root of hope in our lives today must be the Scriptures. We must hold fast to the Scriptures in our lives so that the tenacious root of hope may not be utterly destroyed, but wait for the right circumstances by which fruit may be born in us again.

*And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

**– 2 Peter 1:19-21**

Notice the connections that Peter is making to the role of the Scriptures and the similar language of darkness needed the light of the coming day. Peter's point in this passage was to remind the Church that we have all we need for knowing God's will in the Scriptures and that all of the Scriptures point to Christ, who is the morning star and the One who brings the dawn. God's Word is to have this place in our lives, where we let it sink deep in our hearts and let it help us hold fast to God.

Thus, when we enter into the scene with Zechariah and Elizabeth, we are entering into a scene where the people are waiting for God's arrival, and the couple themselves were waiting and holding on to their own personal hope.

Elizabeth comes from the direct line of Aaron, thus her sons (if she had any) would be eligible to become High Priest, for only those of the direct lineage of Aaron could hold that role. Yet, she had no sons or daughters, and so the prestige of being the mother of a High Priest would not be for her. Furthermore, as the wife of a priest, she would be expected to have sons, so failing to do so only increased the shame and reproach from the community.

Yet, still held out hope that she would one day have children.

The hope that she had was received by faith. She received the hope of the coming prophet of the LORD whose coming would presage the arrival of the Messiah!

First time in 400 years that a prophet would be called to bring God's people back to Himself. This itself was even prophesied in Isaiah 40, where Isaiah prophesied about the coming of the one who would raise the valleys and lower the mountains in order to create a level place to come to God.

*Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts...*

**– Malachi 3:1**

This is the last message of God to His people. Preparing them for His arrival. Messenger sent first, then the presence of the LORD.

*What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'*

**– Matthew 11:9-10**

Jesus confirms that John is the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, and that John is the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5

*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.*

**– Malachi 4:5**

*For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

**– Matthew 11:13-15**

Elizabeth received the hope of God! It was a miracle that God performed to heal her body, and allow her to conceive a child. This is the same way in which Abraham's wife, Sarah, was healed too. These godly women demonstrate that there is nothing impossible for God; He is able to take away the shame and reproach that we all feel at times; He alone is able to heal our bodies and souls, so that we might experience the hope that is found in the promises of God.

Another lesson we can learn is that there is no barrier to God using us to advance His purposes in the world. No age, no physical malady, no station in life, no intellectual capacity, no season or stage of life, is a barrier to God using us for His good and awesome purposes. Wherever you are at now in life, whatever station you find yourself in, whatever age you are, no matter how much or how little experience you have in the things of God, He wants to use YOU to bring His message of hope in Christ to the world!

What was her response to this miraculous healing and blessing? Private communion and enjoyment with God. She kept herself hidden until she was 5 months along, and by that time women are really showing that they have a baby. There is no greater joy than those private joys which only the LORD knows in our hearts.

*The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.*

**– Proverbs 14:10**

God is no stranger to His people, and He alone is able to know intimately the bitterness that we might have, and is able to share in those secret most intimate joys that we have!

## Hope Shared

Elizabeth meets with Mary, and the scene of the two of them is a beautiful one where the hope of the Messiah is prophesied and shared between them.

Elizabeth does not judge Mary for being pregnant out of wedlock, for she, too, had received the miraculous gift of a child in a very unconventional and unusual way!

Her pronouncement of blessing upon Mary causes her to break forth into song.

Because Elizabeth knows about the prophecy regarding her son, she also knows the ones regarding Mary's son. The two are able to share the hope that they have received with one another.

We, too, want to share the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. To share the hope of a transformed life, of a new beginning, of a better family, of a better King.

Every year our church raises money to give to different organizations and individuals who are endeavoring to advance the gospel and kingdom of God in and beyond our city. If you are new to the Resolved Church family, this is a special offering we give over and above our normal, faithful giving as a reflection of our gratitude for God's gracious provision in our lives. We typically split the offering between internal needs and outside missions. This year we have the goal to raise a total of \$8,000 for four things that we desire to bless:

### **We See You Foundation**

The foundation that our Mercy Ministry started which ministers to the homeless neighbors in our community, as well as ministering to those facing mental, health, legal, and spiritual challenges.

### **Herb and Joyce Zick**

Ministering as staff with *Missione di Luce* (Mission of Light) ministry in Italy bringing the hope and healing of the gospel to women who are the victims of sex trafficking.

### **Dave and Kim Maddox**

Ministering as staff with the Global Training Network who train and resource church planters and pastors in Restricted Access Countries. Their focus is on southeast Asia and Africa, specifically Vietnam, Nepal, and Nigeria. They also serve state side with a ministry called Run to Rhonda, which helps rescue and rehabilitate women out of the sex trade here in Southern California.

# Hope Realized

## 1:57-66 HAVE THE PASSAGE ON THE SCREEN

Finally, the day arrives where Elizabeth gets to experience first hand the hope she had been holding on to! She gets to meet her baby boy! Hope realized brought joy and gladness to all!

We can't talk only about Elizabeth, obviously, as she is part of a duo with her husband Zechariah. He also had his own hope realized: to have a son to whom he could pass on the family job, so to speak

This is why the arrival of Gabriel to Zechariah and the pronouncement of the answered prayer is so sweet. It reveals the intimacy of God in His servant's lives. God is not just answering the prayers and needs of the nation, but also in the more intimate and personal longings of His servants.

*But the angel 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. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth...*

– **Luke 1:13-14**

What a beautiful God we serve who not only sees the big picture and is moving to meet those needs, but also sees our own personal longings and desires and moves to meet them in His time as well!

*For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

– **Galatians 6:8-9**

What is the good here that Zechariah was doing? Praying. Praying consistently for a very long time. Holding to the desire that God had given them for a son. Seeking God for the answer to such a longing. This Zechariah had done for years and years, it is good to seek God for our desires. This pleases Him and is good for us. God answered in a powerful way!

Lesson to learn from Zechariah is that persevering hope can only happen through persevering prayer.

*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

– **Matthew 7:7-8**

Do you know the longings of your own heart? Do you know the desires of your soul? God has given us capacities for desires and longings that are rightly ordered by and for Him.

Do you have something that has persistently been a desire and longing of your that you have yet to see bear fruit in your life? Continue to seek the LORD and He will answer in due time!

## **Conclusion**

Elizabeth stands as a woman who teaches us that there is nothing in our lives that can prevent God from working in mighty ways, both in us as well as through us for His glory.

What are things in your life that you believe to be barriers to God working either in you or through you?

She teaches us that we are to hold fast to the hope that we have in Christ, and in due time we will be vindicated for it.

She teaches us that no one knows the secret shame or joys like the LORD, and it is good for us to privately share those with God.

Are you privately taking your shame, or fear, or guilt to the LORD? Are you privately communing in joy with Him?

She teaches us that we are to share the hope that we have with others, and not keep it to ourselves, just like she does with Mary.

Who are you sharing the hope of Christ with in your life today?

She teaches us that persistent prayer is the proper posture of God's people.

What is your prayer life like? Are you diligent to keep with it? Or is it something which comes and goes?

We will end with the prayer song of Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah.

## **Closing Prayer**

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days, to give knowledge of salvation to his

people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Amen.