

25 Days of Advent

Seeing Jesus Through the Eyes of the Christmas Story Characters

ADVENT DAY 4: Dec. 4 – Zechariah, the Father of John the Baptist

Devotional

The Old Testament ends with this verse from the book of Malachi:

See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents. (Malachi 4:5-6)

Why is that important? Because after that, God goes silent...for 400 years! No prophets, no angels, no word at all. If you know the Christmas story well, it's easy to shrug and just move on when you hear about an angel appearing – they're synonymous with Christmas after all. However, angels didn't appear in Zechariah's day – and rarely appear even overall recorded history. They just happen to be all over the Christmas story.

So is it any wonder that Zechariah is skeptical when he is visited by an angel – the same angel who appeared to Daniel 500 years earlier? His response was stunned disbelief. Some reports say Zechariah was 99 and Elizabeth was 88 when John was born, but if that can't be verified, you can be certain they were both well over 60 (that was considered beyond "child-bearing years" at the time). So long he had prayed, so many tears he had shed. And *now* it is happening?

Gabriel tells Zechariah that he and his wife will have a child, a child who will bring back many people to God, and in the Spirit and power of Elijah, he will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. Not just any baby, but one empowered by the Holy Spirit even before he is born to point people to Jesus!

I don't know about you, but I'd be right there with Zechariah in asking, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

I mean get real...a baby...at that age? A prophet like Elijah? Who's going to make that happen? Turns out, God is.

Zechariah was not a very important priest in the temple – he was one of 300 priests in the family of Abijah (Luke 1:5) and one of 24 divisions of priests in Israel. An ordinary priest, but one God chose to have a pivotal role in the coming of Christ.

His eyes (and voice) were opened, and when John was born, Zechariah was ready, fully believing and trusting God would do exactly what He said He would. Zechariah goes on to prophesy over his son, "You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him" (Luke 1:76).

Zechariah served God devoutly in the temple. He obeyed God as the angel had instructed him. As John the Baptist's father, he raised his son as a Nazirite, a holy man pledged to the Lord. Zechariah contributed, in his way, to God's plan to save the world from sin.

Look Up – Connect with God

Read: Luke 1:1-23, Luke 1:57-80

Key Verse: “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...And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah...’” (Luke 1:13, 17(a))

Pray: Father God, I thank you that you chose ordinary people like me to do your Kingdom work. I know that there are times when I just find it hard to believe, especially when it comes to something you’ve told me about myself. I pray right now that you would help me overcome that skepticism, help me hear your voice and be confident that you will do what you say you will do, even when it seems impossible with human eyes. Let me not doubt your ability to do *anything*, including what I cannot see or know. Help me be patient in my “seasons of silence” – and know that you are working even when I can’t see or feel your presence.

Look In – Family Memories

Discuss: There are those prayers we send to God that seem doable and reachable – and there are those we send with a wrapping of cynicism and doubt. Don’t pray small, pray BIG and expect God to respond. Talk about times when you were faithful and earnestly believed – yet heard nothing from God. Those seasons of silence are devastating but often teach us much. If you are in a season of silence now when God doesn’t appear to be listening, be encouraged by this story of Zechariah – the same God who remembered his people in Egypt and remembered his people in Judea and remembered his people on the cross also remembers you. God is not intimidated by the things that worry you. He will work it out for your good and His glory....in His time. God can work in our lives in spite of any circumstance. Things may look hopeless, but God is always in control. "All things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27). Faith is a quality God values highly. If we want our prayers to be answered, faith makes the difference. God does reward those who depend on him.

Activity:

- Advent Tree: make or select an ornament of praying hands and put it on the tree. [Download Ornaments](#) or [Ornament Ideas](#)
- Advent Garland: put the key verse on a paper/card, assign #4, and attach it to the garland twine. [Key Verses](#)
- Advent Cards: select a card and see what the activity might be (i.e., go shopping for mom). [Family Activities](#)

Look Out – Connect with Others

If you are not yet serving in your local church, take the step this Christmas season to fill a much needed role. If you already serve, go just a little deeper in that service. If there is someone in your circle of friends for family who are in a season of wanting children but are not able to conceive, share the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth with them, offer to pray for them and let them know you will stand with them through this season.