

A SIMPLE CHRISTMAS: ADVENT 1 (HOPE)

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Luke 1:1-25

¹Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. ¹⁰Now at the time

of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' ¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, 'How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.' ¹⁹The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.'

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. ²²When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, ²⁵'This is what the Lord has done for me when he

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looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.'

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Context

The gospel begins as many historical and biographical books do in the ancient world: with an introduction that sets out the purpose. It includes recognition of "Theophilus" who might have been a patron of the author or, perhaps, a metaphor for any "God-lover" (*Theo* means God, *philus* means lover) who reads the story. Notice there is no mention of the author's name. The attribution to "Luke" is one of tradition, but it is not in the text itself.

The introduction and the stories that follow are crucial elements to the birth of Jesus. They set the frame and context for what happens in the manger, and connect the new things that happen there to the long, rich history of God's faithfulness to the Israelite people. Zechariah and Elizabeth's story of childlessness and surprise birth echo the biblical wonders of Abraham and Sarah (birth of Isaac), and Eli and Hannah (birth of Samuel).

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. On the outside, Zechariah may have had it all together--a righteous priest. On the inside, he may have been empty and hurting after years of unanswered prayers for a child. Going into the sanctuary may have been "going through the motions."
 - a. Have you felt as though you were just "going through the motions" before? Why?
 - b. Has God shown up for you in these places of emptiness and hurt? If so, how?
3. How might this story reveal how God enters our lives, and who God chooses to use to change the world?
4. How might this story set the stage for what happens next with Mary and Joseph and the birth of Jesus? What connections do you see?
5. How might the "muteness" of Zechariah be a blessing and not a curse? What might you experience differently or learn if you were rendered mute for a time?
6. What does Advent mean to you? How do you practice Advent?

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