

“Zechariah”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
 10 December 2023  
 Text: Luke 1:5-25; 57-66

Here is a most intriguing Christmas story. It tells us about the way God chose to phase out the sacrificial age of the Aaronic priesthood and, surprisingly, the transition was neither violent, nor abrupt. God phased out the Aaronic priesthood as He ushered in the Messianic Age. But the old ways were not treated with contempt—they were honored.

So the history of Christmas actually begins with Zechariah and Elisabeth, **And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.** (Luke 1:5-6) And this was **In the days of King Herod of Judea** (circa 40-4 BC). So sometime around 6 BC, God sent the angel Gabriel with some good news: **your prayer has been heard. Thy wife shall conceive and bear thee a son and thou shalt call him John.** (v. 13) God is going to bless you with a son and he will be part of a great spiritual movement (some say, **the restoration of Israel**; others would suggest the coming of the Messiah) and while that might be the implication of what was said what is communicated is that he will have a son in his advanced years. **And you shall have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth—this is a blessing from on high, the initial expression of divine good will towards men which is Christmas itself!**

It is important that when we hear of God using an elderly couple, that our minds should revert to Abraham and Sarah, and the birth of the Jewish nation. And then there is Noah of the Flood fame, and Moses and Zipporah of the Exodus fame—each couple played a huge role in the forward movement of salvation history. *It is a pattern* which accords with the honoring of the elderly mandate in scripture.

Thousands of priests and Levites were living throughout Judah, Zechariah was an elderly priest of that order and his name had come up, **by lot**, in the rotation—we do not know this: but it may have been something that Zechariah has lived his whole life anticipating, eagerly. It was a great honor to offer sacrifice at the altar of incense for that sacrifice represented the prayers of the whole nation. **Ascending to God as a fragrant aroma.** Zechariah was of **the priestly order of Abujah**, and Elisabeth was among **the daughters of Aaron, which given that she was married to a priest included her in the priestly class.**

The resumption of prophecy, after four hundred years of silence, that was a very big change—a very big Christmas present. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth and others speak prophetically as the new age begins. And the visit by Gabriel was certainly unanticipated as well as disruptive. It clearly overshadows the prophetic utterances in terms of dazzle and pop. But answer to prayer would be one piece with the message: **Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men *to those with whom God is well-pleased.*** (KJV) which the angelic hosts proclaimed again at Jesus’ nativity.

The blessing is much more personal/and astounding to Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth. Gabriel says that even at his and her advanced ages, they will conceive and bear a son and that he should be named John. There are some who dismiss all this and by suggesting that all this, visitations, announced pregnancies, prophecies at all are perfectly

normal—“nothing supernatural here!” I entirely disagree. The text suggests that assuredly they were not “normal”—not for Zechariah, not for Elizabeth.

Oh, and did I mention, the child would be **full of the Holy Spirit from the womb?** John was prophesied to be a great spiritual leader, a mighty man of God and so he is reputed to be to this day. That, and the forerunner of the Messiah, the coming king of Israel. John was obviously an exceptional child! Mary and Elizabeth shared the same grandparents, all in the priestly line. However Mary was not a Levite nor was anyone else in her family circle just cited.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were from *Eim Kerem*—a small village four miles west of Jerusalem—certainly convenient for family visits to Jerusalem! And we read that she sent into seclusion for first five months of her pregnancy—**rejoicing** that God had removed the reproach of childlessness from her! And Zechariah, as a result of his unbelief over the whole matter was literally speechless for the whole pregnancy. He regained his speech at John’s birth! Just as Gabriel said. Coincidence? There are scoffers, I suppose, who assert that all that is perfectly normal, too—nothing *supernatural* here!

God, in his mercy sent Zechariah and Elizabeth ahead of Mary and Joseph, by some months, with angelic announcements and another promise of supernatural conception. A matter of deliberate foreshadowing, of preparing hearts before hand. Is that not gentle and kind?

The most dramatic example of this use of foreshadowing is, I think, the raising of Lazarus from the dead (proof of resurrection life!) which caused such a stir in Jerusalem leading up to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Himself. It was far easier to speak of resurrection when a living example of it is living in your midst—experiential, interactively. Lazarus made scoffing at the afterlife a joke—it moved it from a simply philosophical level to real life instantly. *It was a help for those who would struggle with the death and resurrection of Jesus.* Yes, there were differences but as Lazarus was dead and was alive again, so would Jesus be. And without the Lord demonstrating that in real time, ahead of time—the whole business would have been more difficult than it turned out to be. Yes, there would be an advent and the announcement of John moved things in that direction. Yes, there would be a resurrection and Lazarus served the same function—a forerunner of coming attractions.

This piece of scriptural history shows us how God acts towards us. 1. He is gentle, often foreshadowing as well as prophesying His moves, things to come. 2. He honors the righteous in every generation—often using them as bridges and as change makers. 3. When it comes to redemption it is a full spectrum event—all ages included from the very young to the very elderly. 4. Personal prayer matters to God. That should brighten our Christmas season!

**Amen**