

Prelude to Glory

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Luke's Good News

Chapter 1, verses 8-25

Is God merely a concept, or is he alive and active around us?

Here is what happened. At the designated hour, when it was his team's turn to carry out the priests' responsibilities in the Lord's Temple, Zechariah was chosen randomly to enter the Temple alone and burn incense while the crowd outside was praying. This whole ritual had been handed down from the time of Moses. It was a regular reminder to the people that they are in a relation of dependence on a loving, providing God.

But Zechariah, whose name means "the Lord remembers," seems to have forgotten what God can do. As the incense burned, Zechariah saw a messenger from the Lord standing beside the altar. Zechariah was terrified! But the messenger had good news: "Don't fear, Zechariah. Your plea has been heard. Elizabeth your wife will birth a son, *your* son. And you will name him John." (The name *John* means "God is gracious.")

The messenger continued: "You will gush with joy. Upon His birth many will rejoice. Because in the eyes of the Lord he will be a great man.

"He is not to drink wine or alcohol; he will be filled instead with the Holy Spirit from the time he comes out of his mother's womb, and he will guide many of Israel's children to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will precede the Lord to announce Him."

Centuries earlier, Elijah was the prophet most vividly empowered by God to call people into a close walk with God. Now John was the new Elijah. The messenger said, "John will announce God, so that the devotion of the ancestors will be poured upon a new generation, and apathetic minds will be fascinated with God's ways, in order to get a whole community of people ready for the Lord."

Zechariah asked the messenger, "How do I know this is true? I am too old, and my wife is too old."

The messenger said, "I am Gabriel." To be called Gabriel was like being called God's right-hand man. He was saying, "I am not a mere hallucination. I come directly from the presence of God. I was sent to you to announce this important good news.

"Now look. You are mute, and you're going to stay that way until the day this happens, because you don't trust what I say. And it is going to happen."

The people outside thought Zechariah should have finished by now, and they wondered why he was in the temple so long. When he finally came out but couldn't speak, they

knew that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept gesturing to them, but he could not voice the message.

In silence, he completed his duties in Jerusalem, then he went home. Soon his wife Elizabeth was pregnant. She kept to herself for five months, saying, "This is the Lord's doing, that at this point in my life He focused on me and freed me from the social shame of having no children."

Both Zechariah and Elizabeth needed time to understand what God was doing. Zechariah was quick to judge, even when the messenger was Heaven-sent. Now he was forced to be quiet, wait, and listen. Zechariah may have forgotten God's abilities, but God remembers. Clearly, God was up to something. There was much to think about.

Elizabeth needed time also. She had spent her whole long life ashamed of her inability to bear children. Shame, inflicted from others or from self, hardens into a habitual way of thinking. Now Elizabeth needed to rethink God, and who she was in relation to Him.

Sometimes God's good gifts include a time to wait, a time to think about what God can do, a time to get ready for what God has promised. Sometimes it takes time to remember what kind of a God he is.