

## Advent Week 2 - Zach and Eliza

If you recall from my lesson last week, I explained that each of the four gospels had an intended audience and purpose of why it was written. The audience for the Gospel of Luke was the Greeks. Even though Luke uses Old Testament prophecies in his gospel, he does not use as many as Matthew's gospel. The Gospel of Matthew was written for a Jewish audience so the Old Testament prophecies would have been very important to Matthew to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. However, even though Luke had a Greek audience, he was the only one who told of the birth of John the Baptist. As I continue with this lesson, I want you to think about the following questions: **What is the significance of the birth of John the Baptist? Why is it included at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke?**

Read Luke 1:1-37 with your child(ren) or teen(s). Notice in verses 1-4, Luke tells the reason that he wrote this gospel. He also mentions in verse 3 that he wrote this book in consecutive order, which means it is written in chronological order. Luke is our only gospel which is written in chronological order or the order the events actually happened, so he begins with the birth of John rather than the birth of Jesus Christ. In order to understand the significance of John the Baptist, we need to also take a look at Malachi 3:1 and Malachi 4:5-6. Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament and he was the last prophet of the Old Testament. Malachi tells this final prophecy to the Jews of the Old Testament. In verses 3:1 he foretells of a messenger whom God would send to clear the way for Him. In 4:5-6, Malachi says that God will send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord to restore the hearts of the fathers and the children. After this prophecy is spoken, the Jews did not hear from another prophet from God for 400 years. Between the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are 400 years of silence from God. No prophet spoke to the Jews during this time, however history was still being written. During this time, the temple was overtaken by a man named Antiochus Epiphanes and he defiled the temple. Judah Maccabee led a revolt called the Maccabean Revolt, and the Jews were able to gain control of the temple again. When the priests went into the temple, they discovered that there was only one days worth of oil left to keep the menorahs lit and it would take 8 days to make more. The priests decided to light the oil any way and it miraculously burned for 8 days. This is the reason the Jews celebrate Hanukkah, which is referred to as the Feast of Dedication in the New Testament. If you would like to read more about this celebration, then check out this post on Wikipedia - [Hanukkah](#).

Also during the 400 years of silence, the nation of Israel became under the control of Rome. This is the setting for the New Testament, because the Jews were under the Roman Empire rule. The 400 years of silence was broken when the angel, Gabriel, appeared to Zacharias (Zach) to tell him Elizabeth (Eliza), his wife, would bear a son. In Luke 1:17 Gabriel told Zach that this son would go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. This is the prophecy which was given in Malachi 4:5-6.

Unfortunately, Zach did not believe Gabriel so he was unable to speak until after John was born. After Eliza became pregnant, the angel, Gabriel, appeared to Mary to tell her that she would give birth to a Son and to call His name Jesus. Gabriel is the messenger angel of the Lord and God was keeping him busy during these few months. We will see Gabriel again in this story when he appears to Joseph. I can't imagine how it must have felt to be in the presence of an angel. Let's take a look at the Bible to see how Zach and Mary felt when they saw the angel. In Luke 1:12 we learn that Zach was troubled when he saw

the angel , and fear gripped him. In verse 13, Gabriel responded by saying, "Do not be afraid". He then told Zach that his prayers had been answered and Eliza would bear a son. We should never give up on our prayers because God can sometimes take a while to answer them. We are told in verse 7 that Elizabeth was advanced in years, but in verse 37, Gabriel tells Mary that nothing will be impossible with God. We should always pray without ceasing for answers to our prayers. Wouldn't you hate to give up just before God is willing to answer? Nothing is impossible for God to answer, so be bold when you pray to the Lord. Now lets take a look at Mary's response to the angel, Gabriel. In verse 29 we are told that Mary was perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. In verse 30 the angel said "Do not be afraid". So Zach and Mary were much like the rest of us and they were fearful when they say they angel, Gabriel. We will see John the Baptist again in the gospels when he begins to preach and baptize the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Next week we will talk more about Mary's part of the story in both Matt 1 and more in Luke 1. We will also look at Joseph's dream. I hope that I have given you more insight to the Christmas story. Everything happened in the Bible for a purpose.

Have a blessed Sunday!

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