

Today we will look at the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and to experience their issues as if we were their neighbors....because we are!

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth the parents of John the Baptist is not just a story. It was their reality, and their journey of faith. When we understand it in context, we experience this couple's high hopes, faithful waiting, unfulfilled longings, painful misunderstandings, and dashed dreams, which God ultimately restores in a most remarkable way. Through it all, Zechariah and Elizabeth persist in their faithfulness to God, trusting in Him as a God who remembers.

As a result, their journey, with its waiting, wondering, pain and resignation, speaks personally to our own faith journeys in God's providential hand. **Our Souls will be soothed also, Nd our spirit strengthened** as we continue to trust Him, no matter what comes our way. And so we start...

Luke 1:5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, ,... (5a)

- **Luke is reminding us the Israelite people lived in spiritual and governmental oppression by those controlling the land.** His opening statement informs us that Herod the Great was in power, a bitter reminder that Rome occupies the land. To a devout Jew, this was a dark and oppressive time; Roman occupation was viewed as the equivalent of the kingdom of evil ruling the land.
- **Herod the Great ruled Palestine from 39bc to around 4 some say 2 BC.. he was also the rebuilder and political controller of the great Temple in Jerusalem.**
- The Temple was subject to Herod's continuing approval, it was not only spiritually illegitimate, but corrupt.
- His government leadership was stained in blood ... he was ruthless to perceived enemies and was very insecure killing numerous

members of his own family in fear...it was said you had more security as his pet than as his child..And he ruled over the Jews with an Iron fist

- **Many Jews were prayerfully waiting for God to change the leadership over both. not only do people live in a specific time in History and under a government ...they also have a name...**

Luke 1:5b there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah

- **Zechariah's father, an ordinary Levitical priest whose name we do not know, when he found out God had blessed him with a son who could carry on the priestly tradition of the family he would be overjoyed.**
- **By the time Zechariah was born in Israel's history, the number of ordinary Levitical priests is estimated to be upwards of 20,000. For organizational purposes, the priesthood was divided into 24 divisions of approximately 850 priests each.**
- **Each division would be on duty for one week's Temple service, then off for 23 weeks while the other priestly divisions served in their appointed order. He belonged to the division of Abijah**

and every Priest needed to be married...

Luke 1:5C... And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth...

- **Having been blessed and entrusted by God with this son, Zechariah's father had other cultural responsibilities. One of these was to arrange his son's marriage, which could not be with just any family from the tribes of Israel.**
- **If priests wanted their sons to remain in the priesthood, their sons**

had to marry the daughters of priests..

- Finally a family with a daughter was found for a possible marriage that seemed almost too good to be true. The daughter was named Elizabeth, the name of **Aaron's wife**. Because Aaron had been Israel's very first Chief Priest, and with Elizabeth's name meaning "one *who swears by God*,"
- His son had married into Aaron's priestly line, just as his father had, and generations of their fathers before him.
- Zechariah would have been at least twenty years old and Elizabeth most likely around 15, at their young ages they would have many children...

Luke 5: ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

- Luke informs us that Zechariah and Elizabeth were upright ("righteous" in several other translations) in God's eyes. In this culture, that meant that they were behaviorally obedient in observing the Ten Commandments, as well as all the Levitical laws concerning diet, including all the feasts and festivals.
- In describing Zechariah and Elizabeth this way, Luke is also telling us that God looked upon this couple with favor, not only because of their faithful behavior, but because their hearts were right in God's sight as well.
- Luke's use of the present tense "observing" tells us that this couple consistently lived out this righteous life...in the mindset of Luke's first-century readers, there is nothing unusual or unexpected in the unfolding of this story.
- So far it all fits with their understanding of how things work for "good" people.

- **GREAT EXPECTATIONS** **The only question is how many children, and more particularly, how many priestly sons might God bless them with?**
- **in their religious culture** You were either “righteous” or you were a “sinner.” You were either “in” or “out.” Therefore, it is no surprise that in this culture “childlessness was a woman’s and a family’s greatest misfortune.”an an indicator of being in sin and under the judgment of God...
- *And in defining their expectations for a family, they unknowingly set the stage for future disappointment...*

Often when we set our expectations, we also set the stage for our disappointments.

- Life seldom turns out like we thought or hoped it would. Thus we need to be people who hold our hopes and dreams loosely, not clutching them as if there is only one way they can be.
- **God loves us but is not controlled by us...God gives us free will but his will prevails....As a result, we can comprehend only a small portion of what God is really doing in and with our lives. So it is best to avoid rigid expectations of how and when God should be doing things in and with our lives.**

So With Zechariah and Elizabeth!!!

NLT Luke 5:7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

- **With one sentence, Luke packs decades of pain, disappointment, hurt, frustration, self-doubt and misunderstanding into one sentence, with the words “no child” Childlessness would have been an**

indescribable wound in his and Elizabeth life... The Jews considered advanced in years after 60 years of age

- **To be considered upright in God's eyes, and yet to be childless all these years, was incomprehensible to Luke's listeners. It was outside a devout Jew's mindset, it simply could not be.**

- In Zechariah and Elizabeth's culture, God didn't bless "righteous" people that way. Everybody knows that—or do they?

- **As the decades unfolded, only one conclusion was possible within the family clan's mindset. Although Zechariah and Elizabeth appeared to be righteous, they must have offended God in some way, and He is punishing them for their sin.**

Do you have your own notions of how God's blessing system should work?

- Have you ever had experiences of "waiting on the Lord?" Waiting for Him to do something that seemed so right?

- How about waiting for so long that it seemed you were waiting in vain? How did that waiting affect you?

- Have you ever had to wait on the Lord during periods of illness, unemployment, singleness, wayward children, infertility, or spiritual dryness? For how long? What challenges, encouragements, affirmations, discouragements, did you experience during those times of prolonged waiting?

- Have you had any waiting disappointments that caused you to feel that somehow God short-changed you in life?

- **Take Heart! The Lord never wastes a trial that includes Waiting!!**

- for Zechariah and Elizabeth to go on and ...stay together...and serve the Lord...they would have had to invite the Lord into their pain...and be comforted, healed made ok with it...and strengthened to go on... they would have met God in a way they never would have

without this pain...To honor him while bearing unbelievable pain...you know a strength from God to carry on that many will not experience!

So how did Zechariah and Elizabeth handled this progressive accumulation of cultural disgrace? They simply persevered in being faithful.

*NIVLK 1:8 **Once** (one time) when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot (coincidence), according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.*

- **A Jewish priest was a minister of God who worked at the Temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services.... One week a year**
- **Zechariah was a member of the Abijah division, on duty this particular week. Each morning a priest was to enter the Holy Place in the Temple and burn incense. This great honor could only be done once in a priest lifetime...**
- **Lots were cast to decide who would enter the sanctuary, and one day the lot fell to Zechariah.**
- **But what appeared to be chance was not by chance ... Zechariah was on duty and that he was chosen that day to enter the Holy Place—**

Incense was burned in the Temple twice daily. 9am before the morning sacrifice and 3pm after the evening sacrifice...

LK 1:11 While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John.

- Zechariah and Elizabeth probably prayed for many years only retreating from after his wife experienced menopause...as the Jews. **Were talking almost 20 years ago...God did not forget though his response was silence....**
- But unbeknownst to them....God was guiding the events of history to prepare the way for Jesus to come to earth. God was coordinating events ...people places and things...while keeping the enemy off balance....
- Their lifetime of pain replaced with unfathomable joy!! But wit there is more!

Luke 1:14 You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”

- **So the answer when given answers questions and give information that blows his mind!!...the birth will be a miracle...His son will be great in the eyes of God, turn many people to the Lord... give hope to fathers to give to their children...and is the one to introduce the Messiah...**
- **know this my friends every prayer will be answered, every wrong righted, every hurt healed...all the suffering will end...that is what the Christmas promise is all about...we give each other gifts...
God gives us the gift of his promise to heal us to answer our prayers, to bring justice, to make things make sense... however the timing and circumstances are in his control...but his promise to do it gives us the courage to face anything and go through it... knowing he has a timing for everything**

When there is a God thing going on...it will be answered or revealed in a way...

1. You will not figure out...before hand Super-naturally....
2. it will be done it the natural...but with superness attached to it...
3. So that God will get the credit or Glory
4. And people blessed and the enemy defeated

Jumping ahead...fill in

Luke 1:23 When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. ²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵ "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."

Jump ahead six months...Her cousin Mary was just informed she would carry the Messiah...she asks a ...basic biology question

LK 1: 34 Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

- (how will I be pregnant and a virgin at the same time) "how will it happen"... **Born to a virgin woman...**

LK 1:35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. (supernatural... outside of our dimension) So the **holy one** to be born **will be called the Son of God**.³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ *For nothing is impossible with God.*"

- ...remember **Miracles are impossible in the natural but are common place with God...**

A sage once said, " What is the difference between people who make a difference in the world and people who choose not to? Are they any smarter, have superior upbringing, better educated, older, younger, black, white, male, female? What is it? The answer is none of the above. The answer is the ability to make a commitment and take action."

***** *Luke 1:38* Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

- **what I like about Mary her commitment was more important to her than her mental capability to understand the ways of God**
- **She affirmed her commitment...now she will take action and go in faith to see her cousin...whom she obviously did not know was pregnant until the angel told her..... So she goes**

NLT Luke 1:39 A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town ⁴⁰ where Zechariah lived.

- **The Hill country of Judea is where Bethlehem, and Jerusalem are located. About 90 miles by car from Nazareth... approximately a week to travel by foot. Ein Karem was there home town**
- **She did not travel with Joseph, so it was a risky journey...probably joined a caravan from Nazareth area making the same journey.**
- **Mary will travel this again when she is nine months pregnant...but does not know this at the time.**

When she arrived ... ^{verse 40b}*She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. ⁴³ Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? ⁴⁴ When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. ⁴⁵ You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.”*

- **The Holy Spirit in Jesus filled Elisabeth with Knowledge of what God was doing...with out her knowing previously.**

- **John who Elizabeth was now in her sixth month also responded to the Holy Spirit by doing what a baby does...Kick and move around!**
- **He is already announcing the coming King ...as prophesied by Malachi 400 years earlier..**

Mary is blessed says Elizabeth because she believed what the Lord would do...but Elizabeth did not get this info on her own...the Holy Spirit revealed it to her and she must have known by now that her husband did not believe and has been unable to talk for six months!

- **Elizabeth is now being given much insight and information, which fill in the questions she has had for many years. She paid a steep price relationally and socially in waiting on the Lord...Now it is all worth it now! And makes sense...**
- **It will all be worth it for us too...that is a Christmas gift worth waiting for...**

LK 1: 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

- **You will bear the son of God...the Messiah! ...and name him Jesus means “the Lord Saves” or God’s salvation or God saves...
****There is no greater favor than God taking his Humanity from her DNA...Mary’s pregnancy would be a miracle...from the Holy Spirit of God..His God DNA would be combined with Her Human DNA...thus fully God and Fully man...**
- **How will he ever be great? I am a nobody...and the Romans are in charge...there is no Jewish King of Israel**
- **In a culture in which the act of naming was highly significant and naming a male child a most sacred and solemn task, Zechariah’s father had just given him a name that came with a history and a legacy.**
- **And so when the eighth day came, the time for circumcision and the naming of this blessed gift from the Lord, this priest declared the infant’s name to be *Zechariah*. **the meaning of *Zechariah* is “whom *Jehovah* remembers,”****
- **During a desperate time for the nation, Zechariah’s father drew upon a prophetic name that harkens back almost 500 years in the nation’s history.**

- **In the time of returning from Babylon to rebuild the Temple, a prophet and priest named Zechariah was visited by an angel, From that vision, he penned God's prophetic words of the Messiah's coming, His kingship, and His enduring reign of peace and prosperity. Those words from long ago also served as a reminder of the promise that God made to Israel.**

He penned the famous verse

NLT Zech 9: 9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Also Zechariah prophesied the Lord's second coming ..ZECH 12 and the reign of The Lord forever... ^{Zech 14}

- *Psalm 27:14... Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*
- *Psalm 130:5&6a I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning.*