

## Gabriel Visits Zacharias

By

Rev. Todd W. Allen

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Luke 1:57-80

Christmas is a time of surprises. There was a lady who was preparing her Christmas cookies. There was a knock at the door. She went to find a man in poor, tattered clothes, obviously looking for some Christmas odd jobs. He asked her if there was anything he could do. She said, "Can you paint?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm a rather good painter."

"Well," she said, "there are two gallons of green paint there and a brush, and there's a porch out back that needs to be painted. Please do a good job. I'll pay you what the job is worth."

He said, "Fine. I'll be done quickly."

She went back to her cookie making and didn't think much more about it until there was a knock at the door. She went, and the obviousness of his painting was evident: he had it on his clothes.

She said, "Did you finish the job?"

He said, "Yes."

She said, "Did you do a good job?"

He said, "Yes. But lady, there's one thing I'd like to point out to you. That's not a Porsche back there.

That's a Mercedes." -- Bruce Thielemann, "Glory to God in the Lowest,"  
Preaching Today, Tape No. 75.

The moral of that story is that we should be sure we rightly understand the message lest we grievously err. Zacharias served as a priest in the temple. It came his turn to enter the temple and burn incense. As he was ministering before the Lord the angel Gabriel appeared to him and brought him a message... **"Do not be afraid,**

Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. <sup>14</sup>“You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. <sup>15</sup>“For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. <sup>16</sup>“And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>“It is he who will 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.” (Luke 1:13-17)

The message from Gabriel to Zacharias was first of all one of glad tidings for he and his wife because Gabriel told him that their prayers that they might have a child had been answered and they were going to have a son.

What glad news to a childless couple that has long had a keen desire for children to be told that their desire will be fulfilled? This was certainly part of the glad tidings to Zecharias, but their good news was also good news for others beside themselves.

The birth of this son who was to be called John would be a great blessing for many people, **many will rejoice at his birth.**

The message to Zacharias fulfilled the prophesy of Malachi, <sup>1</sup>“Behold, I am going to send My Messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts...<sup>5</sup>“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. (Mal. 3:1; 4:5)

Zacharias got advance information that the appearance of the long promised Messiah was imminent and that this answer-to-prayer son will precede his coming.

God made sure that some people would be prepared for Messiah's coming by the ministry of John the Baptist and his preaching of the need of repentance. Men today, as then, are prepared for the gospel by repenting of their sins. The underlying supposition is that the preaching of personal repentance must precede or be a part of the gospel message.

But I want to underscore the fact that Gabriel was sent to Zacharias in answer to prayer. We learn that for some time Zacharias and his wife had been praying for a child. Many people will not pray for things like this. They place limits on what can be prayed for because they think it is presumptuous to ask God for a baby. However, God shows in Gabriel's visit to Zacharias that God can and does answer such prayers.

The angel Gabriel says, **“Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.”**<sup>14</sup>**“You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.**

What a glad message to a childless couple. What hope looms for the future when a child is born? For better or for worse the child will make a difference and the parent's lifestyle and influence will weigh heavily in shaping the direction of that new life. God chose godly parents for John the Baptist. Scripture tells us, **“They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.”** (Luke 1:6)

I want you to think about the fact that in answering prayer for Zacharias and Elizabeth the answer exceeded the request. This baby was destined to be great with God, a child who was to become the last of the Old Testament

prophets and the forerunner of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. His ministry was to be in the spirit and power of Elijah, a preacher who would turn many to the Lord their God.

How little we realize the part that prayer plays in God's plan and purpose. Some may think that prayer is just a hit and miss proposition with more misses than hits but this episode shows that we can know that God uses the prayers of his people to bring to pass things that are in his eternal plan and purpose. We ordinarily don't know the far-reaching effects of our prayers but this incident gives us great insight.

The prayers of Zacharias and Elizabeth for a son were heard and fit into God's plan and purpose. Their prayers set in motion the fulfillment of the previously revealed plan of God to send a preacher in the spirit and power of Elijah before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. What Zacharias and Elisabeth prayed for was exactly what God intended and now brings to pass. His will for many is brought to focus and given expression by the prayers of this childless couple. And do you suppose for a moment that God did not inspire their prayers? Who gives a woman or a couple, a desire for children? Is not such desire inspired by God? Did not God tell our first parents to be fruitful and multiply? So isn't this prayer to have children God's Word finding expression?

But notice now a negative note in this account. What could be negative, you might ask? Here is a prophesied event destined to occur in which everything is declared to be good news; good news in the fact that prayer was answered; good news in the fact that the son to be born will be great, filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb; good news that the son to be born will turn many souls to God. What possibly could be negative in this angelic visit?

Well, even though Zacharias apparently didn't have a problem believing in God; and even though he was living a godly life and was serving as a priest in the Temple, when Gabriel came and told him he was going to have a son, he stumbled. His faith couldn't rise to believe the heaven-sent message. He had his doubts. Even though he and Elizabeth had long been praying for this very thing he didn't believe it could happen

Unbelief seems so logical. He poses a very common sense question, **“How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.”**

Now isn't that the way most people would think? Zacharias must have thought that Gabriel would be understanding and give him an answer. Unbelief sounds so plausible. Everyone knows that women don't have children in their old age, so most people would be sympathetic toward Zacharias. But I notice that Gabriel was not sympathetic. He rebuked him for doubting his word. He said to him, **“I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. <sup>20</sup>“And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”**

The lips that expressed unbelief would remain speechless until the Word of God was fulfilled. I believe we can learn a couple of things from the dumbness God put on Zacharias. First of all, his speechlessness certainly humbled Zacharias and we all can use some humbling. Secondly, his loss of speech confirmed in a very significant way that the Word of God was most certainly going to be fulfilled. But think about this: his dumbness also prevented him from speaking out his doubts to others. After all, what we say has consequences. We can speak words of faith or we can speak words of doubt.

Gabriel rebuked Zacharias for his doubt in no uncertain terms. And by shutting his mouth he kept him from expressing verbally his doubts. Silence is golden and the word of faith is precious but words of doubt express uncertainty and suspicion. Zacharias' words impugned the veracity and integrity of God's messenger and message.

Suppose God had not shut Zacharias' mouth? What do you think Zacharias would have said about his experience when he came out of the temple? He probably would have said, well, an angel told me that Elizabeth was going to have a baby but I asked him how I could know this since we are so old. But he never told me and I must admit that I have my doubts about Elizabeth having a child. But he never had the opportunity to say anything because God shut his mouth.

Our words have consequences. God did not allow Zacharias to cast doubt on his Word. Faith is contagious and so is unbelief. We can cancel out our blessing by speaking words of doubt and unbelief.

Words are important. Attitude is important. Examine your words and consider whether they are faith words or unbelieving words. Only faith words please God. We should be careful to think and talk in faith terms.

Gabriel's message is important for all people who will hear it and believe. It is part of the unfolding story of redemption. Following Gabriel's visit to Zacharias, sure enough, Elizabeth became pregnant and in due course gave birth to their first and only son. On the eighth day of they came to circumcise their son and very much like we do at a covenant baptism, his name would be verbally stated.

They all thought that he would be called Zacharias after his father, but she said, no. He is to be called John. This puzzled the people because no one in the family had that name, so they turned to Zacharias, who still couldn't

Speak, and asked him what he wanted him to be called. So he asked for a writing tablet, and he wrote on it, HIS NAME IS JOHN. And as soon as he did that he regained his ability to speak. And he began to praise the Lord, just as Gabriel had said that he would rejoice at his birth.

You have to have a voice to praise the Lord. Had he done that when he first heard the message of the angel he would not have had to be silent for nine months.

Every Word of God will be fulfilled. The stronger one's faith the greater one's rejoicing. We can learn from Zacharias' experience to never doubt the Word of God. What God says will surely come to pass.

Zacharias had doubted God's Word but God forgave him and used him to be a vessel of prophecy on the occasion of his son's birth. Today we can read this prophecy and we can believe or we can doubt as Zacharias did when Gabriel spoke to him. To doubt is to miss the present blessing that God intends for you and me.

Time won't permit a verse-by-verse exposition of the prophecy, but we can extract some very meaningful points to think about and believe.

God's covenant promise to Abraham that his seed would be the Christ in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, was now at the point of fulfillment. There is to be redemption for His people; he has raised up a horn of salvation in Jesus Christ.

This salvation includes the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from the hand of all our enemies and he promises to guide our feet in the way of peace. No matter what comes upon us in this life we can always expect to triumph as we trust in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A story out of World War II will illustrate what the message of deliverance and victory should mean for those who hear and believe the gospel. A Scottish Presbyterian named Dr. Murdo Ewin McDonald, was a prisoner of war held by the Germans. One morning a

friend awakened Dr. McDonald. His friend had been secretly listening to the BBC. Good news had been received of the Allied invasion of Normandy. The bearer of the good news whispered only three words in Gallic: **THEY HAVE COME!**

McDonald threw reserve and restraint aside, ran back to the barracks and began shouting, "They have come! They have come!" Response was instant and incredible. Weak men shouted as they jumped for joy, rugged men hugged each other and wept with glee. Some stood on tables and shouted, as other rolled on the floor in fits of elation. Their German captors, not yet knowing of the D-Day Invasion, thought them crazy. The jubilant allies were still prisoners within the formerly intimidating walls. Nothing had changed outwardly. Inwardly, they knew that everything had changed. Victory was yet to be accomplished but still they lived in the joy that the invasion had already occurred.

Gabriel's message was that salvation was coming. A son was to be born who was forerunner to the Messiah. Luke 1:17 **"It is he who will 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."**

John the Baptist came preaching a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and he prophesied **"As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."**<sup>17</sup>**"His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."** Luke 3:16-17

The message has not changed. The Christmas season speaks of the birth of Christ and many celebrate it without appreciating what it all means.

We are to make ready the way of the Lord by making his paths straight. Whatever is crooked must be made straight; whatever is sinful must be put away. Repentance is preparatory to the coming of Jesus Christ. Before his appearing to Israel there came John the Baptist preaching repentance. Just as the people then had the need to repent so do we today need to repent of our sins. Be sure this Christmas that you have repented of your sins and have received the Savior into your heart.

Hymn #213 “What Child Is This”