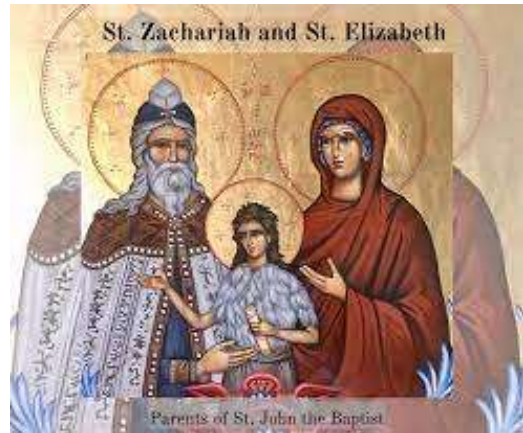


Zechariah and Elizabeth

When Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest by the name of Zechariah from the priestly group of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was from the family of Aaron. Both of them were good people and pleased the Lord God by obeying all that he had commanded. But they did not have children. Elizabeth could not have any, and both Zechariah and Elizabeth were already old. One day



Zechariah's group of priests were on duty, and he was serving God as a priest. According to the custom of the priests, he had been chosen to go into the Lord's temple that day and to burn incense, while the people stood outside praying.

All at once an angel from the Lord appeared to Zechariah at the right side of the altar. Zechariah was confused and afraid when he saw the angel. But the angel told him: Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayers. Your wife Elizabeth will have a son, and you must name him John. His birth will make you very happy, and many people will be glad. Your son will be a great servant of the Lord. He must never drink wine or beer, and the power of the Holy Spirit will be with him from the time he is born. John will lead many people in Israel to turn back to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord with the same power and spirit that Elijah had. And because of John, parents will be more thoughtful of their children. And people who now disobey God will begin to think as they ought to. That is how John will get people ready for the Lord. Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know this is going to happen? My wife and I are both very old." The angel answered, "I am Gabriel, God's servant, and I was sent to tell you this good news. You have not believed what I have said. So you will not be able to say a thing until all this happens. But everything will take place when it is supposed to."

The crowd was waiting for Zechariah and kept wondering why he was staying so long in the temple. When he did come out, he could not speak, and they knew he had seen a vision. He motioned to them with his hands, but did not say a thing.

Luke 1: 5-22

Background

Worship involves an act of complete surrender to God. We do not worship for our own benefit. We worship to please God. During worship we do not pray "my will be done" but "God's will be done." Worship is about completely surrendering to God's message and God's way of doing things.

This story opens with Zechariah involved in worship but not really engaged. Zechariah may have been a church professional leading worship, but he did not have complete trust in God.

Zechariah belonged to the twenty-four families who were the special "sons of Aaron and the priestly class." On a rotating basis, a priest was chosen from each family to tend to the holy altar located in the most sacred space of the temple. One day, while Zechariah was carrying out this privileged task the Archangel Gabriel appeared and announced the good news that Zechariah would have a son.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were an older couple with no children. Their story was similar to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 16), Isaac and Rebecca (Genesis 25), Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 30), Elkanah and Hannah (1 Samuel 1). God gave them children. For many years Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child. The bearing of children was considered a great blessing. Barrenness was considered by some to be a tragedy and disgrace.

Zechariah did not believe the angel Gabriel! It's not surprising that even a priest in the holy sanctuary would doubt God's messenger. It's human nature to doubt God's power. Zechariah forgot the true nature of worship. Worship is a complete surrender to God's purposes for our lives. Zechariah prayed in the temple but did not believe when those prayers were answered.

It's probably an understatement to say that the Archangel Gabriel was not pleased with Zechariah's response. Zechariah was punished and could not speak because of his unbelief.

Zechariah remained mute till after his son was born. Eight days later (according to the custom), the child was presented at the temple.

During the ceremony of dedication, the child received his name. The temple authorities assumed the child's would be named after his father. Elizabeth said, "No, his name is John" (Luke 1:60). Zechariah agreed by writing on a tablet "His name is John" (which means "God has been gracious"). Suddenly Zechariah could speak and he sang a beautiful hymn of praise

Praise the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come to save his people. Our God has given us a mighty Savior from the family of David his servant. Long ago the Lord promised by the words of his holy prophets, to save us from our enemies and from everyone who hates us. God said he would be kind to our people and keep his sacred promise.

He told our ancestor Abraham that he would rescue us from our enemies. Then we could serve him without fear, by being holy and good as long as we live.

You, my son, will be called a prophet of God in heaven above. You will go ahead of the Lord to get everything ready for him. You will tell his people that they can be saved when their sins are forgiven.

God's love and kindness will shine upon us like the sun that rises in the sky. On us who live in the dark shadow of death this light will shine to guide us into a life of peace.

The Benedictus, Luke 1: 68-79

Zechariah had spent nine months listening to God. Zechariah finally believed God's message. His son was to be a prophet. John's life would be a living act of worship. John would boldly proclaim a message of preparation of the world's salvation.

Reflections

Zechariah started out a privileged priest and ended up a humble servant of God. Just because someone has a special position in a church does not mean they always have their lives and faith in order. We are all sinners and saints at the same time.

Zechariah's story reveals that worship needs to be all about God. We come to worship to please God, not ourselves. We come to worship to hear God's message. We give God pleasure when we listen and obey.

Elizabeth, however, was obedient to God. When her cousin Mary came to visit (called the Visitation), Elizabeth did not put up objections or raise questions. She demonstrated her devotion.



⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (Luke 1: 42-45).

Zechariah's transformation came when he was forced to listen all the time, day after day, week after week, and month after month. We bring pleasure to God when we obediently listen and follow God's purpose for our lives. Zechariah finally got the message. His hymn identifies John's work as part of God's promises and the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Let's remember the strong faith of Elizabeth when we worship. Her name means "God is my witness." She demonstrated complete devotion to the mighty acts of God. Elizabeth is a living witness to the Lord of all Creation. Together Elizabeth and Zechariah teach us there's a time for silence and a time for praise.

Strength Finders talent: Developer

A developer finds meaning and joy in helping others. This can occur through mentoring and helping another person accomplish their goals. Elizabeth helped Mary at an important time in her life. Mary was three months pregnant when she went to live with Elizabeth. Ironically, Mary probably helped Elizabeth in her final trimester. The teacher benefited from help from the student. Essentially they helped each other (joint development).

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252224/developer-theme.aspx>

Enneagram connections: Six

While some sixes are consumed with fear and thoughts that can lead to over concentration about threats and risks; the healthy six can rise above and concentrate on taking care of friends and family.

Elizabeth exhibits healthy behavior when she cares for Mary and provides her with a safe place to be.

A high level six can play a key role in establishing and supporting a group or extended family. These reflect Elizabeth role for caring for her niece. Furthermore, six's arrow connects with nine which can be a source of authentic peace and wellbeing. Elizabeth once again demonstrates these very attributes.

She also helped Mary successfully navigate challenges of pregnancy in difficult times. Elizabeth was channeling healthy care for Mary using her three arrow.

Elizabeth may have exhibited she was leaning into her seven wing when she announced the pure joy she (and her infant) encountered when first meeting Mary.

<https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-six>

The Visitation

There is a wall of flesh before the eyes
Of John, who yet perceives and hails his King.
It is Our Lady's painful bliss to bring
Before mankind the Glory of the skies.
Her cousin feels her womb's sweet burden rise
And leap with joy, and she comes forth to sing,
With trembling mouth, her words of welcoming.
She knows her hidden God, and prophecies.

Saint John, pray for us, weary souls that tarry
Where life is withered by sin's deadly breath.
Pray for us, whom the dogs of Satan harry,
Saint John, Saint Anne, and Saint Elizabeth.
And, Mother Mary, give us Christ to carry
Within our hearts, that we may conquer death.
Joyce Kilmer, 1917

Questions

1. How can we listen to God in our everyday lives? Do you have a planned listening time for God? What would such a plan look like?
2. How does a lack of faith make us mute sometimes? How can we strengthen our own faith?
3. This portion of Zechariah's hymn of praise celebrates the God of history. Why did the world need a savior? What is the "way of peace"?

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The Benedictus, Luke 1: 68-79