

# The Announcement of John's Birth

📖 Luke 1:5-25

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

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🌐 [fbgbible.org](http://fbgbible.org)

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

Last week we studied the prologue to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, verses 1-4. The language of verses 1 and 3 indicates that Luke composed a document in keeping with the standards of a formal court document. His document was an addition to many who had previously written down the events fulfilled by Christ that had changed the world forever. In verse 2, like, or in accordance with those oral traditions that were handed down to Luke and others by those who were from the beginning with Zacharias and Elizabeth, eyewitnesses, doing autopsies, and servants, assistants in the propagation of the word of the gospel, it seemed fitting to Luke also, in verse 3, to enter into this tradition and write down what the eyewitnesses taught, especially since he had followed the course of events very meticulously all the way back to the beginning. He decided to do so in an orderly way, not necessarily meaning chronological order, but an order, whether thematic, chronological or logical. He did this for Theophilus, a man of an honorable estate who had already been instructed by the Catechisers, so that he would know thoroughly the truth concerning the things he had been taught, and that these things were true. The research methods Luke used were utilized by the Spirit of God to record Scripture.

I want to make four introductory remarks and then move into the first narrative, the announcement of John's birth. First, the material in Luke 1-2 are completely unique to Luke's Gospel. This fits with the statistic that 50% of Luke's gospel is unique. This means there are no parallel passages in Matthew or Mark to compare with this section. Therefore, apart from these two chapters we would not know any of this information.

Second, the language of Luke 1-2 is the most Hebraistic of all of Luke's writings. A. T. Robertson said, "To the end of chapter 2 we have the most Hebraistic (Aramaic) passage in Luke's writings, due evidently to the use of documents or notes of oral tradition."<sup>1</sup> In other words, this section is Hebraistic in style because Luke was most likely using documents or notes from Jews who saw these things from the beginning. Furthermore, he says, "Luke tells his story from the standpoint of Mary as Matthew gives his from the standpoint of Joseph. The two supplement each other. We have here the earliest documentary evidence of the origins of Christianity that has come down to us."<sup>2</sup> So his understanding, which I think is highly probable, is that Luke 1-2 were taken from records left by Mary or notes others took from personal interviews with Mary. This would explain why this section of Luke's writings uniquely has a Hebraistic style.

Third, Luke 1-2 follows a repetitive comparison between John and Jesus. In both, the parents are introduced, then the angel Gabriel appears, then a sign is given and lastly a woman who was childless gets pregnant. There are differences, of course, but Luke is emphasizing the comparisons between John, the forerunner of Messiah, and Jesus, the Messiah to show the unique relationship between the two.

Fourth, Luke 1:5-25 is the record of how God broke the 400 years of silence. In this sense, Luke is the chronological beginning of the NT. J. Vernon McGee remarked, "Chronologically Dr. Luke begins the New Testament. He goes back to the birth of John the Baptist, to where the angel Gabriel appeared to John's father as he served in the temple."<sup>3</sup> So, this is the earliest record chronologically of the NT era.

Having seen the Prologue in 1:1-4, we now come to the beginning of Luke's research, the Announcement of John's Birth in 1:5-25. John is the forerunner of the Messiah. Luke began with John because his role was to turn the nation Israel back to the covenant so they would be prepared for the Messiah's coming. The passage shows how God chose to reveal this truth to John's father while he was carrying out his priestly duties in the temple.

In verse 5 we read the historical situation in the land when this took place, **In the days of Herod, king of Judea.** The significance of a note about Herod is that Herod was a Gentile. There was a Gentile ruling in the land of Israel. There were many Herod's, but this Herod was **king of Judea** and there was only one Herod who ruled as king. This was **Herod** the Great. The reference to **Judea** does not limit his rule to Judea proper, but to Judea in its broad political sense, including Judea proper, the Galilee, much of Perea, and Syria. Herod had ascended to the throne by military and political means in 37BC. He became known as the Great because of his great building projects throughout the land of Israel, such as the temple. He was a descendant of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau and enemies of Israel. Shrewdly, he married the beautiful Hasmonean princess Mariamne in order to gain favor with the Jews. But as soon as his power was established he became a paranoid megalomaniac, killing her as well as the two sons born to him by her. It was a very dark time for the people of Israel, but in the midst of these dark times the announcement was soon made that the light of the world was about to break onto the scene. The beginning of that light was the announcement of the birth of the forerunner, John.

The timing was near the end of Herod's reign. Schlegel said, we know "From historical and astronomical details presented by Josephus," that "Herod's death can be pinpointed to March-April of 4 BC (*Antiquities* XVII.6.4-5-XVII.9.3)." From Matthew 2 we know that Jesus was born one to two years before Herod's death. This would place Jesus' birth in 6/5BC. Since John was born six months before Jesus then he would have been born about the same time.

It was during that time that **there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.** Pentecost wrote, "These names in themselves may be significant, for Zechariah means "the LORD remembers." Elizabeth means "the oath or covenant of God."

It appears that our attention is directed to the truth that "The LORD remembers His covenant."<sup>4</sup> It would be John's role to turn the nation Israel back to the covenant. Now this **Zacharias** is noted to be a **priest** and his wife **Elizabeth** was **from the daughters of Aaron**. This means that both of them were descended from **Aaron**. This meant that the son to be born from them, John "was by lineage one who was to become a priest."<sup>5</sup> The priesthood was divided into twenty-four courses during the reign of King David. The twenty-four courses are listed in 1 Chronicles 24. Each course served at the temple twice a year for one week each time. **Zacharias** was **of the division of Abijah**. This was the eighth course listed in 1 Chronicles. However, it is not known for sure whether Zacharias was truly descended from **Abijah** or not because after the Babylonian captivity, only four of the twenty-four divisions returned. The four were reconstituted into twenty-four, preserving the original twenty-four names in order to keep as much continuity with the original priesthood as possible. Zacharias was descended from the course that was assigned the name **Abijah**. This meant that "Twice each year Zacharias went up from his home in the hill country of Judea...to take part for a week in the sacred tasks of the service in the Temple."<sup>6</sup>

Next we observe in 1:5 that Zacharias **had a wife from the daughters of Aaron**. It was desirable for a priest to marry within the house of Aaron. As the old commentator Plummer noted, "To be a priest and married to a priest's daughter was a double distinction, like a preacher married to a preacher's daughter."<sup>7</sup> Yet this married couple faced their own plight as explained in the next two verses.

In 1:6, note that **They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years**. These verses seek to show that the reason Zacharias and Elizabeth had no child was not because they were unrighteous. To be childless was considered a disgrace among the Jews. Bock says, "The absence of children was generally seen as a reproach in Judaism and in the OT."<sup>8</sup> But 16 militates against this being the cause when it says, **They were both righteous**. Some think this informs us that they were both justified before God, in the sense of imputed righteousness that comes through faith like Abraham, However, the participial phrase **walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord** defines the **righteousness** in terms of their obedience. They were **walking blamelessly**. The way one **walked** referred to the way one lived their life. They lived their lives **blamelessly**. The Greek word **blamelessly** is *αμεμπτοι*. It does not refer to sinless perfection. Rather it means that "They recognized they were sinners and brought the necessary sacrifices."<sup>9</sup> In other words, they lived their lives how God wanted them to under the OT economy. The OT rule of life was the Mosaic Law. It was for sanctification, not for justification. The law specifies how to live and what sacrifices to offer when they failed to live that way. Zacharias and Elizabeth lived according this law and when they failed they offered the required sacrifices. Constable elaborated on the word, saying, "Blameless" (Gr. *amemptos*) means that they dealt with sin in their lives quickly and as God required, not that they were sinless (cf. Phil. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Thess. 3:13; Heb. 8:7). This Greek word is the equivalent of the Hebrew *tam* that describes Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Job (Job 1:8)."<sup>10</sup> In the OT times, people like Noah and Job are said to have

been found blameless by God. This is because they were living as God wanted them to live during their dispensation. We can be found blameless as well if we live life as God wants us to live; living by means of the Spirit and dealing with our sin quickly. If we do, we are blameless in God's sight just as Zacharias and Elizabeth.

**But in 1:7, they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.** The 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews would have found this to be an enigma since they interpreted **no child** as meaning the parents were to blame. But in this case they were **blameless**. Constable said, "This verse shows that Elizabeth's childless condition was not the result of her sin."<sup>11</sup> Instead, the reason she had **no child** was **because she was barren**. Additionally, now **they were both advanced in years**. This may not have impaired Zacharias' ability to have children, but it certainly impaired hers. Thus, Elizabeth had two strikes against her; one she was barren and two, she was past the age of child-bearing. Because of these two strikes against her it was practically hopeless that she would ever have a child. Verse 25 describes the situation they faced living in a Jewish society as a situation of "disgrace." It is difficult for us to imagine the shunning this couple faced, but it would be difficult to bear. However, the situation is paralleled by the OT situation of Abraham and Sarah when God was about to do something great. So, verses 6-7 increase our anticipation that God is about to do something great. The rabbi's made the point that whenever the Scripture says, "she had no child," God gave her a child.

In 1:8-9, **Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.** This would have been the high point of Zacharias' career. It was at the time **while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division**. From verse 5 we learned that he was of the **division of Abijah**. This was the eighth of twenty-four divisions established during the reign of king David. Each division of priests would come up to Jerusalem twice a year for service, one week at a time. It was during one of those two weeks in the year 8/7BC that **he was performing his priestly service**. But this was no normal week of service as verse 9 makes clear, **he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense**. There were almost 20,000 priests at the time and so lots were chosen so as not to cause problems among the many priests who wanted to partake of this honor. Shepard explains, "About fifty were engaged every day, the duty of each being determined by the white-stone "lot," that there might be no contention in the house of the Lord. The offering of incense was considered the highest duty and could be exercised only once in a lifetime. The lot had fallen at last on Zacharias for this high task." Since Zacharias could only partake of this honor once in his life and that day had come, it means this was the high point of his career. The **burning of incense** took place twice a day, in the morning and evening in preparation for the sacrifice. At the time of Christ, the evening offering had been slightly modified so that it was known as the "perpetual offering." Preparations for it began earlier than in the past, around 2:30 in the afternoon. The offering would be made about 3:30. This was about the same time the evening prayers were being offered at the temple, so there were many people present. The incense was a symbol of prayers going up before God. Thus, as the people were praying outside the incense was being offered up within the Holy Place. This seems to be the

situation as described in 1:10, **And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.** Thus, the lot Zacharias drew seems to be for the evening offering of incense.

But by the anticipation created by vv 6-7 and knowing that every lot that is cast is determined by the Lord, we are not surprised to find that God does something great in v 11. **And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.** Zacharias had entered the Holy Place with the table of showbread on his left and the golden menorah on his right. Just before the inner veil stood the altar of incense. As he offered the incense **an angel of the Lord appeared to him.** The angel's location was **to the right of the altar of incense,** between it and the golden menorah. Pentecost said, "According to Jewish tradition, the right side of the altar was reserved for God and the left side for the angel Gabriel. The angel did not appear where Jewish tradition would have placed him—on the left side of the altar—but rather on the right side, the place reserved for God Himself." This may explain Zacharias' response in verse 12.

**Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him.** The verb translated **troubled** is *εταραχθη* and can mean "shaken up," but it can also mean "confused." It's not clear which meaning is intended, but if Zacharias knew the Jewish tradition that the right side of the altar was reserved for God, then we can see how he might have thought he was seeing God. This would certainly cause him to fear because God said to Moses that no one can see God and live. So it's possible that Zacharias was initially confused and thought he might die. We are also told that **fear gripped him.** The word *επιπεσεν* means "to fall upon" and certainly fear "fell upon" him at this time. It was not something Zacharias expected.

But as is usual when someone sees an angel the angel will comfort them. So, in 1:13, **But the angel said to him, "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.** The word *αγγελος* refers to a messenger and so an angel of God delivered a message from God. Initially that message is **Do not be afraid.** There is no question that **Zacharias** was **afraid.** But the reason he should not fear is because **your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son...**The message is not one of near death but good news that a new life will come into the world. Zacharias' petition **had been heard.** There is some debate about what petition **Zacharias** had been offering in the Holy Place at the altar of incense. Of course, most people naturally think that he was praying that he and Elizabeth might have a son, perhaps as part of his prayer for the nation. However, his response in verse 18 seems to indicate that having a son was a remote thought in Zacharias' mind. He said to the angel, "How will I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." That response seems to show that it was not what he was praying about at the altar and that he no longer had hope of having a son. Another possibility is that he had simply been praying for the nation Israel. This was what the priest would focus on praying for at the altar of incense and Zacharias probably was. However, the **angel** closely connected **Zacharias' petition** with his wife **Elizabeth** bearing a **son.** Therefore, a third option is that the **angel** is referring to his past **petition for a son** now being answered. I think this is the best understanding. Bock said, "God answers

sometimes come at a surprising time, in a surprising place, and in a surprising way."<sup>12</sup> Zacharias and Elizabeth probably prayed for a son for many years, but God answers in His own timing and in His own way. The reason God had not answered their prayer before was because He wanted to do something great. He wanted the focus of all Israel to be upon the son born to an old barren woman. He had done this before with Sarah. He was doing it again with Elizabeth. Lastly in verse 13, the angel reveals what they should name him. **and you will give him the name John.** It was customary for the father to name the son. We are not given much insight into the significance of **the name John**, but we know from 1:61 that no one in their family was named **John**. The meaning of the name may be significant; John means "YHWH has been gracious." Certainly YHWH was being gracious, not only to Zacharias and Elizabeth, but especially to the nation Israel, since John's role would be to restore Israel to the covenant in preparation for the Messiah's coming.

In 1:14, **You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.** Zacharias will personally get **joy and gladness** because of John's coming. This joy and gladness will be his because he gets to be a part of God doing something great through him and his wife, Elizabeth. Somehow the coming of John relates to the coming of salvation. Thus, we begin to see the theme of Luke nearing, salvation is coming, especially for Israel, but also for all mankind. Also, **many will rejoice at his birth.** This phrase does not refer to the **birth** event itself, as verse 15ff explains, but to the coming of John in **his** ministry. Not everyone in Israel rejoiced at John and his ministry, most notably the Sadducees and Pharisees. But **many** did.

In 1:15 the angel explains why many will **rejoice** at his coming. **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.** There is a lot here, but it all relates to the role John will play in preparing the Jewish people for the Messiah. In verse 15, **For he will be great in the sight of the Lord.** He will **be great** in His **sight** because of the greatness of his mission. Many prophets came and announced kings, but no prophet came who announced the King of kings. John would have this privilege. This anticipates what is said later of John, that "among those born of women there is no one greater than John." This meant that no one single personage in history had a greater privilege than John. That greater privilege was preparing the way for the King.

Further we learn in verse 15 that **he will drink no wine or liquor.** The priests abstained from **wine** and **liquor** during their times of service. The Nazirites could make a vow to abstain for a period of time or for their whole life. Either way it served as a sign of consecration to the Lord. John would never **drink wine or liquor**, a sign of special consecration to the Lord. This further enhances the important role John will play in the plan of God.

Lastly in verse 15 we learn that John **will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.** There is some debate over whether this means John **will be filled with the Spirit while** inside **his mother's womb** or

from the time he comes out of **his mother's womb**, since the preposition *ἐκ* is translated "in" but should more likely be translated "out of" or "from." Some think this is resolved by Luke 1:41 where we read of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." However, it seems clear to me that this verse refers to Elizabeth being filled with the Holy Spirit while verse 15 refers to John being filled with the Holy Spirit. It's not 100% clear to me either way, but what is clear is that either way it is unparalleled and miraculous. No one was ever **filled with the Holy Spirit** either in the womb or from the moment they exited the womb. The point is that **the Holy Spirit** would have a unique relationship to John, a relationship unlike any He had sustained with any other. In the OT the Spirit filled prophets, priests and kings to help them fulfill their ministry. He also filled others on special occasions such as those who built the temple furniture. But He came and went. It does not appear that He would come and go from John, but more that He would permanently fill him from at least the time of birth. This is another factor that makes clear that no one born of women was greater than John.

To **be filled with the Spirit** is related to control of **the Spirit**, since it is paired with not drinking wine or liquor, just as Paul does in Eph 5:18 where he commands us to not be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit. In some way filling relates to control. If we are filled with wine we are under the control of wine, but if we are filled with the Spirit we are under the control of the Spirit. The word **filled** is from *πιμπλημι* and means "to cause to be full." John would be full of the Spirit from at least birth. His filling would be a sovereign work of God, unrelated to John's obedience or disobedience. The filling of the Spirit throughout John's life would enable him to fulfill his role as forerunner of the Messiah.

In 1:16 the angel prophesies what John will do in his ministry. **And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.** The focus of John's ministry upon Israel is clear. He came to **turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.** The verb **turn** is *επιστρεψει* and means "to cause a person to change their beliefs with a focus on the one to which they turn." At the time the Pharisees dominated Jewish life and practice. The Jews were taught to follow the practices of the Pharisees. John would be instrumental in **turning many of them back to the Lord their God.** This would mean returning them to covenant faithfulness; faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant. This was the role of a prophet, clearly placing John in the line of OT prophets. And note the response to John's ministry. **many of the sons of Israel would turn**, not all. John's ministry would have partial success. **Many** would realize that following the Pharisees was the wrong path. They would change their beliefs and turn back to the Lord their God. But not all would. The Sadducees and Pharisees would remain in opposition to John and would lead others in opposition.

In 1:17 the angel gives his final announcement in the Holy Place. **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.** The words **as a forerunner** are not original, but are understood. John would do one thing with two purposes. The

one thing he would do is **go before Him**. It is tempting to identify **Him** as Jesus, but Jesus has not yet been mentioned. The one who is mentioned in verse 16 is **the Lord God**. So it is best to say that he will **go before the Lord God**. Specifics later identify Jesus as **the Lord God**. John would **go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah**. The OT prophet Elijah never died. He was taken up in a whirlwind. Mal 4:5 predicted that God would one day send Elijah the prophet again before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Significantly, the angel does not say that John will be **Elijah**, but that he would come **in the spirit and power of Elijah**. Fruchtenbaum said, "Before Yochanan was even born, the angel Gabriel had declared that he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk. 1:17; 4). When Yochanan was asked if he was Elijah, he emphatically said, "No, I am not" (Jn. 1:21)...Yeshua stated that, had the kingdom offer been accepted, Yochanan would have fulfilled Elijah's function, which was "to restore all things" (Mt. 17:11; Mk 9:12). However, since Yeshua was rejected, Yochanan did not fulfill Elijah's function, and, consequently, the prophet himself must come to do so."<sup>13</sup> The point is that John had a ministry that was very similar to that of **Elijah**. He came in the same **spirit**, meaning with the same goal or aim, to get Israel to turn back to the Lord. As far as **power**, John did not do any of the miraculous things that Elijah did. But as far as being a powerful influence among the people, this he did do. So the one thing he would do is **go before the Lord God** and he would do so in the same **spirit and power of Elijah**.

The first purpose would be **to turn, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous**. The phrase **to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children** is a quote from Mal 4:6. It is part of Elijah's ministry when he returns before the great and terrible day of the Lord. However, John's ministry would be similar to Elijah's in this respect. What does it mean **to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children**? It probably means that one of his purposes would be to restore broken family relationships. When people turn to the Lord, a natural result is they fix their relationships with one another. This would prepare them for the coming of the Lord. The angel adds, **and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous**. In a similar fashion, John's purpose would be to turn **the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous**. All of this relates to his ministry of repentance that he would call the nation Israel to in light of the imminence of the kingdom. By turning to the Lord God they would naturally mend their broken relationships and have the attitude of righteous people.

The second purpose would be a natural result of the first, **to make ready a people prepared for the Lord**. John's purpose was to get in a state of readiness, **a people prepared for the Lord**. Again, **Lord** is not yet identified as Jesus. They were simply to be prepared **for the Lord God**. A prepared people would be a people looking for the **Lord** and anxious to crown Him as king and living blameless lives according to the Mosaic covenant.

In 1:18 Zacharias responds to the angel's words, **Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."** In essence **Zacharias** is requesting a sign that this is true because both he and his wife are old. This was not the best response. He should have believed on



the basis of the OT prophets that the Messiah was soon to come and be preceded by a forerunner. That he did not believe resulted in him receiving a sign, but it was a sign that caused him an inconvenience.

In 1:19, **The angel answered and 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.** The first thing the angel does is identify himself as **Gabriel**. **Gabriel** had spoken twice to Daniel without any question from Daniel. He revealed the 70 sevens prophecy, which was very near its timing of completion. Zacharias should have known this prophecy. Now when Gabriel makes this announcement Zacharias questions its validity. So the angel identifies himself as Gabriel to give credibility to his message. The second thing Gabriel does is identify his station or post. He **stands in the presence of God**. Surely if Gabriel is graced with serving in the direct presence of God he speaks the truth of God. Lastly, Gabriel reveals that he has **been sent to speak to Zacharias and to bring him this good news**. The function of an angel is to serve as a messenger. Gabriel claims to be a messenger. It is implied that he is a messenger of God. God is the one who **sent him to** convey this message. The **good news** he brought is good news not only for Zacharias and Elizabeth, since they will have a son and their disgrace will be removed, but it is good news for all the nation, since the son will have a great role in the plan of God and will turn many back to the Lord. Therefore, because of the angel's identity, his station or post in the direct presence of God and his being sent by God, Zacharias should have believed. Zacharias was not doubting the angel's word; he was doubting God's word.

But he did not and so he requested a sign. That sign is found in 1:20. **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.** Now the sign specifically was not just muteness, the inability **to speak**, but also deafness. While it's not clear here, later in 1:62 it is clear that they had to make signs to Zacharias to get him to respond. Often deafness goes along with muteness. Zacharias experienced both as a sign. The sign would last **until the day when these things take place**, that is, until the day when Elizabeth gives birth to a son. So for more than nine months Zacharias will be both deaf and mute. The reason stated by Gabriel is **because you did not believe my words**. To not believe Gabriel's words was not to believe God's words because Gabriel was simply a messenger of God. Zacharias should have believed his words but now he would have to suffer this inconvenience for over nine months. As a side effect, this would become known to all the people and it would serve as a sign for them too. And these things, the angel says at the close of verse 20, **will be fulfilled in their proper time**. So no matter whether Zacharias believed his words or not, these words **will be fulfilled in their proper time**. The **proper time** is the time in God's sovereign plan. There was a specific time God planned to send the forerunner of the Messiah.

Now all this was going on inside the Holy Place, but outside verse 21 tells us, **The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple.** The typical prayer was a short one, lest the people outside start to worry. But obviously **Zacharias** has been in the **temple** an abnormally long period of time and

the people were starting to worry. It was taking much longer than expected and the people were **wondering** what was going on.

In verse 21 they deduce the answer. **But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute.** Now when the priest would emerge he would pronounce a blessing on the people, **but when he came out,** the angel Gabriel's words came true, **he was unable to speak to them.** He could not utter the blessing. And somehow they **realized that he had seen a vision in the temple.** This was a correct deduction but we don't know exactly how they arrived at that conclusion. It's possible that Jewish traditions about what causes a person to become mute were involved and that these involved seeing a heavenly vision. But it seems more plausible that he was **making signs to them** and they gathered from these **signs** that he had seen a vision. And after they realized this Luke reports that **he kept making signs to them, and remained mute.** So he kept trying to communicate with them and share this good news of a son to be born who would turn many from the nation Israel to the Lord, but he could not make this message known and he **remained mute**, so that he could not communicate this message.

In 1:23 **When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.** So he finished his week of **service** and **went back home.** And 1:24 records further fulfillment of the angels Gabriel's words. **After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."** It was a disgraceful thing for a Jewish woman to be childless. But the Lord was preparing to do something great through Elizabeth. So when she was old she **became pregnant.** Quite obviously she became pregnant because Zacharias had relations with her and God opened her womb so she could conceive. It is a supernatural conception but it is not a virgin conception. Then after she became **pregnant** it says **she kept herself in seclusion for five months.** There have been many speculations as to why **she** hid **herself** away but Luke does not tell us. The most likely reason is explained by verse 25, she was so thankful that the Lord had dealt with her in this way that she spent this time in awe of Him. All of her life she had wondered why she was barren but now she knew God's purpose. God was doing something that she could never have imagined all those years, and it humbled her and she was awe-struck. As verse 25 says, **"This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."** She was amazed that God had finally decided to remove the disgrace that had cast a shadow over her whole life. It was and is a remarkable thing to hold a place of honor on par with Sarah who also conceived in old age, and indeed to even supersede her place as the one who would give birth to the forerunner of the King.

In summary, this picture emerges; in the days when Herod the Great was ruling as king of Judea there was a priest named Zacharias of the division of Abijah and his wife Elizabeth, also a descendant of Aaron. They both lived their lives blamelessly in the sight of God, following the commandments of God and making the proper

sacrifices. But sadly, they had no child because Elizabeth was barren and now they were both old. So it happened that when Zacharias went up to Jerusalem for his biannual priestly service that the lot was cast and he was chosen to offer the burnt incense in the Holy Place. When he went in the people were praying outside. As he offered the incense the angel Gabriel appeared on the right side of him between the altar and the menorah. He was immediately confused and greatly afraid. The angel comforted him by telling him that his petition for a son offered years before had been heard and his wife Elizabeth was going to bear a son and that he should name the son John. That this son would bring great personal joy and many in the nation Israel would rejoice. He would be great in the sight of the Lord and would be consecrated for service to the Lord, even filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. In his ministry he would turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. He would be the forerunner who would go before the Lord with the same spirit and power as Elijah. As a result, many family relationships would be mended and many disobedient would take on the attitude of the righteous, so that his ministry would make ready a remnant of Israel prepared for the Lord. Yet Zacharias did not believe this because he and his wife were old and he wanted some sign of the truth value. Consequently, the angel identified himself as Gabriel who stands in the direct presence of God and had been sent by God with this message. Because Zacharias did not believe he would be both deaf and mute until the son was born. Outside the people were waiting, and wondering why it was taking so long. But when he finally came out he was unable to speak and so he was making signs and they deduced that he had seen a vision and he kept trying to get them to understand but was unsuccessful. Sometime after this Elizabeth did become pregnant and she kept herself hidden away for five months in awe and humility before the Lord that He had taken notice of her and had removed her disgrace among men. At this point the way is cleared for the announcement of Jesus' birth in the next section.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, the circumstances we find ourselves in may not be understood, but God has a purpose for them. Zacharias and Elizabeth could not have a son. They did not understand why, but God had a purpose for it. He wanted to do something great. We may not understand why our lives are the way they are either. But God does. He may want to do something great. We don't have to understand why everything in our life is the way it is to trust God; we just have to trust God. Second, we can live blameless lives before God. The Scriptures refer to a believer as blameless when he lives his life according to the rule of life in his dispensation. Zacharias and Elizabeth were living blameless lives under the Mosaic Law, meaning they followed that rule of life and when they sinned they offered the appropriate sacrifices. Third, God answers prayer in His timing and in His way. He may answer immediately, He may answer eventually, or He may refuse to answer. But we know that God has our best interests in mind, and He will answer at the proper time if that is His purpose. God answered Zacharias' prayer for a son offered years, probably decades before. God did not forget his prayers and he had a purpose for delaying the answer. God wanted to do something great that they could never imagine. So keep praying. Fourth, it's not a good thing to not believe the word of God. Zacharias did not believe the word of God. He wanted to see a sign to confirm that it was true. He should have simply trusted the OT promises of God. We

should simply trust the promises of God too. There is no reason to not believe the word of God. Finally, God is taking notice of you and your difficulties. He noticed Elizabeth and her disgrace among men and He remedied that. God is taking notice of you too. Don't worry, He has a purpose for it. Let Him handle it.

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<sup>1</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Lk 1:5.

<sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Lk 1:5.

<sup>3</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Luke)*, electronic ed., vol. 37 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 20–21.

<sup>4</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 40.

<sup>5</sup> John A. Martin, "Luke," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 202.

<sup>6</sup> Shepard, *The Christ*, 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Lk 1:5.

<sup>8</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 78.

<sup>9</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Luke)*, electronic ed., vol. 37 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Lk 1:6.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Lk 1:6.

<sup>12</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 83.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah From A Messianic Jewish Perspective, Vol 2*, 611.