

Luke 1:5-25, 57-69

Zechariah and Elizabeth's Christmas

Image Church // Christmas wk. 2

Introduction

Good morning Image family... Glad you're here...

*We're in week two of our series called **Christmas** where we're looking at the realities surrounding the coming of Christ...*

And what we're doing is diving into the stories and circumstances of the people involved in the very first Christmas...

*There's a lot that we can learn from these Christmas Characters as we unpack their unique stories surrounding the **inauguration of the very first Christmas**...*

If you have your Bible go ahead and turn to **Luke 1**, this morning we're going to look at Zachariah and Elizabeth's Christmas...

This is the very first story in the book of **Luke**, and it's a significant one

It's a story about a couple that had experienced unmet hopes and unanswered questions... You ever been there?!?

Luke 1:5-25

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** Both were righteous in God's sight,

living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. **7** But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

Zechariah and **Elizabeth** were facing a hard reality that a lot of people face today- they weren't able to have kids...

- **BTW:** Did you know that it's estimated that 1 in 6 couples struggle with infertility? And those numbers are actually **conservative** because there are a lot of people that just don't talk about it or admit to it... ¹

This is a real reality that many couples face... So if that's you this morning, know that you're not alone... I know it's hard, and I know it can make you feel alone, but you're not there are others battling with you...

Something else that was unique about their struggle back then was that their lineage was everything... They didn't have 401K's, no retirement plans, no Hospice, no social security ... **Kids** served in that capacity- they were the ones that would take care of the parents...

Kids were also a sign of social status, dignity, and honor all of that, you were known and identified based on who your parents were...

So, for **decades** this couple was unable to get pregnant... **We don't know all of the details**, but I'm sure that there were many times when Elizabeth might have thought she was pregnant, maybe felt something, only to find out that's not true- she may have even had some miscarriages...

They would have had to deal with the questions people asked, **people with no feel that would make off-handed comments**... They would have to watch as their friends got pregnant and had kids...

¹<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/infertility-in-the-life-of-the-church/>

Maybe that's you today- maybe you can relate with their struggle...
And you've been fighting through the hurt and the pain of infertility...

Or maybe it's not infertility but you are experiencing **unmet hopes and unanswered questions in your life** in some way...

I don't know what it is, but you do... Maybe you're not in the midst of it right now but you know someone that is... **How do we navigate it??**

Well, I think it's important to note that the text says that **Both were righteous in God's sight** ...

- This is there to point out to us that their infertility wasn't because of any unrepentant sin in their lives.²
- These were people that loved and served the Lord and yet they still were suffering...

Listen, just because you love and serve the Lord **doesn't** mean that you will be free of **unmet hopes and unanswered questions in your life**...

- *But it does mean that you can endure them...*

Verse 8: When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, **9** it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. **10** At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside.

Casting Lots was like throwing dice...

- But here's the thing, **Proverbs 16** says God controls the **lot**, the dice...
- **IOW:** this isn't a coincidence... **It's important for us to see that God's at work here**...

² Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 73.

Verse 11 An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. **12** When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. **13** But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard."
What prayers is the angel talking about? I think the angel's referring to the past prayers of Zechariah and His wife for a child...

But I also think that given the **context**, and the response that we're about to see from Zechariah in a little bit, it's referring to the prayers that Zechariah would have been praying at that moment as he offered incense to the Lord on behalf of the people...

Which would have been praying for **restoration- prayers for the Messiah to come as a rescue!**³

- Well God's about to deal with both of these things...

Keep reading ... Verse 13:

Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. **14** There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. **15** For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. **16** He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **17** And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people."

So, **Zechariah** and **Elizabeth** are about to have a son! The child that God is giving them will be a great prophet and he will prepare the way for an even greater child, the Messiah!

God has a specific role for him to play in his plan of redemption...

Don't miss this, I want you to see is that God was working behind the scenes... **And what we see here is that He chooses to work in and through the prayers of His people**... V.13 **your prayer has been heard.**

³ Bock, D. L. (1994). *Luke: 1:1–9:50* (Vol. 1, p. 82). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Charles Spurgeon said that: *prayer moves the arms that move the world...*

We see evidence of that reality here... *This leads me to the first thing that we need to see from **Zachariah and Elizabeth's Story**...*

In the midst of your unmet hopes and unanswered questions...

1. Pray(v. 13)

What we see here is that God listens when you pray!

The angel says: **Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard.**

Listen, **the same God that heard the prayers of Zechariah is the same God that hears your prayers today...**

And **the same God that worked through prayer then is the same God that works through prayer today!**

Psalm 34:15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry for help.

1 John 5:14-15: This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.

1 Peter 5:7 ...casting all of your cares on him, because he cares about you...

God hears your prayers... I know it doesn't seem that way, but He does... I know it may seem like God's not listening but He is...

Here's the thing we see in all this: **God doesn't always answer our prayers on our timeline.**

For years Zechariah would have prayed for a son, and for years the people of Israel would have prayed for restoration and for the Messiah to come!

And yet what he was met by was silence...

But listen to me, **we have to understand that we can't mistake God's silence for God's absence...**

God was very much present and working in the midst of what seemed like silence...

*Somebody needs to hear this, this morning: The gap that you see/feel right now in what you're praying for... The silence that you feel like you're sitting in... **It's intentional...** *Let that sink in...*

God is a good Father that always does what's best for His kids... The problem is what's best isn't always what we want...

- **Sometimes what we need is a season of petitioning prayer in the midst of pain or disappointments...**
- Sometimes what we need most is a **not right now, a wait** from God to keep our dependence anchored on God...
- That's the hardest one because it feels like *a non-answer...*

Here's the thing we need to understand, prayer is something God's given us to keep us tethered to Him, it keeps us anchored in faith...

- Even if you're not getting the answer you want you're exercising the muscles of your faith...

God listens when you pray... So as you're in the midst of your **unmet hopes and unanswered questions in your life**, keep praying, He hears you- He's listening... And He's working...

Now, let's look at how Zechariah's response to all this:

18 "How can I know this?" Zechariah asked the angel. "For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years."

You got to see this, my man, really throws his wife under the bus here...

- He says *I'm old*, but my wife's *well along in her years*...
- In the original language "well along in years" is more significantly older...

So, he's like, *I'm old but my wife bless her heart- she's a dinosaur... I don't think you get it Gabe, if you told her to act her age she'd die!*

- *Note to self: never say* that your wife is *advanced in years*...

What I want you to see here though, is that Zechariah immediately looks at the ability, or lack thereof, of he and his wife...

- ***He's doubting God's ability based on their present reality***...

He lacked faith... But before we write him off on this and be like *really dude? You got an Angel right here telling you what's about to go down!!*

We have to understand that Zechariah spoke out of a place of pain and hurt based on a long-standing reality that they had been in the midst of...

There are many of you who may be in a similar place of hurt and pain... some of you are even struggling with bitterness toward God...

And right now, if you're honest, it's affecting the way that you view God... Your faith has been challenged, maybe it's even wavered, you're finding it hard to trust God, you're doubting His presence in your life...

And it's hard to hold onto God's promises in your life because you struggle to see God's presence in the midst of your hurt...

I want you to watch how the angel responds to Zechariah, because there's something here for you to see...

- Something that shows you that God knows where Zechariah is, and he knows where you are and what you are experiencing...
- Through Gabriel, God's about to intentionally address this lack of faith and trust...

Verse 19...

19 "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. **20** Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

Now, I know you're like *seriously??* This is what God has for me in the midst of my pain??

Let me explain the significance of this though... For God not to respond to the lack of faith of Zechariah would mean that either God didn't care, or He was ok with it...

- What we see here is the God does care and He's not ok w/it!

God took the time to address Zechariah's lack of faith because he cared, and wanted to remind Zechariah who He was...

- ***Example***: Disciplining kids... You do it because you love them...

God's like, "*You want a sign, here you go, but I'm going to apply this sign in a way in which it rebukes you for doubting me!*"

And it's in his rebuke or discipline of Zechariah that we see God's love...

Love? How is this love?

- This is where you have to see the difference between punishment and discipline... ***Punishment is to pay you back, but discipline is to bring you back!***

God wanted to bring Zechariah back, back to remembering His promises, remembering His faithfulness, remembering His control, to remember that HE IS and has been working to fulfill His purpose for the world!

And so, *God puts him in the first-ever timeout* to think about it all and to remind him that he needs to trust in the Love and Character of God...

So, the angel puts him in timeout- *no iPad, no cell phone, no video games, and no talking to your friends...*

- By the way, let's be honest, this season of silence had to be awesome for Elizabeth- the peace and quiet that she would enjoy, *winning every argument, always having the last word...*

Here's the second thing that I want you to see from this:

2. Own your inability and trust in God's ability

There are some of you like Zechariah, that in the midst of your **unmet hopes and unanswered questions in your life surrounding things that you can't control...**

And you've forgotten who God is... You're not in a posture of faith, you're in a posture where you looking to try and fix something that you don't have the power to fix!

- You're spinning your wheels on what you can do rather than owning your limitations and trusting in God's ability...

Analogy: *if you're spending more time looking and stressing over what you can do than trusting what God can do then you're like Zech.*

When we go through things in this life so often we look the same place Zechariah did, which is to his ability...

- We doubt God, or we question God, or we look to our own strength...
- What God wants is for us to see our inability and to trust in His ability... *That's what faith is!!*

There's some of you this morning and God is trying to get your attention through Zechariah! **God wants your faith right now...**

Jump down to verse 24: After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, **25** "The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people."

So, Elizabeth conceived just as the Lord said, and she responded with joy because God's removed her source of pain...

- She says that God's taken away her **disgrace**...
- This is the reality that she and Zechariah have been living with all these years...

Look at Luke 1:57-69

57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she had a son. **58** Then her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her his great mercy, and they rejoiced with her.

59 When they came to circumcise the child on the eighth day, they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. **60** But his mother responded, "No. He will be called John."

61 Then they said to her, "None of your relatives has that name."

62 So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called. **63** He asked for a writing tablet and wrote: "His name is John." And they were all amazed.

Looks like timeout worked for 'ol Zechariah! You have to see the humor in this... *And then look what happens:* **64** Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. **65** Fear came on all those who lived around them, and all these things were being talked about throughout the hill country of Judea. **66** All who heard about him took it to heart, saying, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the Lord's hand was with him.

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and provided redemption for his people.

69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David, [he's talking about Jesus here]
70 just as he spoke by the mouth
of his holy prophets in ancient times;
71 salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of those who hate us.
72 He has dealt mercifully with our ancestors
and remembered his holy covenant—
73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham. [Remember back to
Malachi: God is faithful to his covenant even when His people have
not been faithful to Him- God's made a way for sinful people through
his love]...
He has given us the privilege,
74 since we have been rescued
from the hand of our enemies,
to serve him without fear
75 in holiness and righteousness
in his presence all our days.
[Now he's going to talk about John and his role- it all makes sense to
Him now]
76 And you, child, will be called
a prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord
to prepare his ways,
77 to give his people knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins.
78 Because of our God's merciful compassion,
the dawn from on high will visit us
79 to shine on those who live in darkness
and the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Here's what I want you to see... There's a meaning here beyond just
that God can give children to people who sometimes think there's no
more chance... We have to look through the immediate provision for
Zechariah and Elizabeth, to what it's pointing to!

Zechariah saw that God's provision in the midst of their *personal
brokenness* was only a foretaste of the ultimate provision to come
through Christ.

God's *immediate* provision of a son for Zechariah and Elizabeth,
would be for the purpose of pointing to God's *eternal* provision for
the world through Christ.

Here's what that means... In the midst of your **unmet hopes and
unanswered questions you need to:**

3. Cling to the hope that's been offered to you in Christ.

What we need to see is that through *Zechariah and Elizabeth's story*
there's **a theme of restoration, and hope** that points to Jesus and
gives us a picture of what Jesus would come and do...

Zechariah directs us there when he finishes by celebrating **God's
merciful compassion that will come through Christ who will shine in
the darkness and be the guide to the way of peace** (V. 79)...

See, **Zechariah saw through his blessing to the greatest blessing...**

I want you to see that God would come and deal with what's at the
root of our **unmet hopes and unanswered questions, our sin...**

See, the brokenness that we experience, the hurts we have, the
disappointments that we walk through in life... it's all a result of the
brokenness that sin caused when it entered the world.

Sin is destructive and pervasive and it is eating away at this world...
it's tainted everything... It distorted everything... It's like a disease.

God could have left us to fend for ourselves in the midst of our sin,
but instead of leaving us to the brokenness of this world, He offers us
hope... Hope that Zechariah saw... freedom that he saw... The
victory that he saw... **Mercy** that He saw...

And it would come through the promised Messiah, Jesus, God in the flesh would come down to us to do what we could not do for ourselves...

In Him, we find an end to all of our ***unmet hopes and unanswered questions...***

It's because in Him and with him we can endure as we await the hope stored up for us in the future!

What Jesus did was the start of something... One day HE WILL MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!!! His resurrection was the start of that!!!

Here's what I need you to understand, the point here in all this is not that God will give you that thing you want, or answer your why, or change your circumstances...

- Can God do those things, absolutely, should you give up praying for them- **NO**...
- God still gives good gifts to his children in this life- we see that in this story...

The point is that the **GREATEST gift** God gives to us is **HIMSELF!**⁴

I want you to think about it like this...

Example: Great gift to AG, will get old... Will want something else, or transition past it...

- Not true when it comes to God...

What I want you to see is that ***God is the gift that keeps on giving...***

In light of that, I want to leave you with the last point to understand what this means for you in the meantime as you sit in your unmet hopes and unanswered questions...

4. God is actively working for your good and His glory.

What we see is that in the midst of His salvation plan He's also meeting human needs in a way that directs you to Him...

- God gave personal attention to both Zechariah and Elizabeth...
- God may not do it in the way He did it for them...

But God is working, He's actively involved in your life too, and He's orchestrating things in a way that draws you closer to Him...

That's your greatest good- to grow in your knowledge and love of God... And in that, He gets the glory!

I know u may be confused right now... I know you may have your doubts...

- The same was true for Zechariah... He had his share of confusion and doubts as well...

But I want you to look past that to the reality that we see here that God is working...

I want you to think about this, the coming of Christ was set up through a couple that was struggling with ***unmet hopes and unanswered questions...***

What is God setting up in your life as you're in the midst of unmet hopes and unanswered questions?!?

- *Remember all of this started with casting lots!*

Listen, He's not working in a way that's reactionary, He's not trying to figure this out as He goes... It's all part of His plan...

Example: I want you to think about a ***tapestry...*** When you look at the back side of it, it looks like a mangled mess...

God has woven together a tapestry and right now all you may be able to see is the back of it... mangled strings in seemingly pointless places with knots and colors that don't make sense...

⁴Adapted from JD Greear, sermon. Surprise: Kingdom Come Series. March 6, 2011.

And yet one day, maybe in this life, or maybe when standing face to face with Jesus the tapestry will be flipped around and you will see the immeasurable beauty of what God was doing all along for your good and His glory!

Conclusion [VAMP]

So how do we deal with unmet hopes and unanswered questions...

- 1. Pray**
- 2. Own your inability and trust in God's ability**
- 3. Cling to the hope that's been offered to you in Christ.**
- 4. God is actively and intentionally working for your good and His glory.**

Questions for Community Group Discussion

1. What is the point of prayer?
 - a. What is one thing you have been or are going to be praying for through this Christmas season?
2. What is an area in your life that you need to trust in God's ability? Example. (job, relationships, etc)
3. What is the gospel?
 - a. It is the hope that has been offered in Christ and it is great to remind each other of it!
 - b. Have a few people verbalize the gospel for your group or go around and share the gospel or your testimonies
4. How do we trust God is actively and intentionally working for our good and his glory when we are unable to recognize how he is doing so?