

Luke 1:1-25

Luke begins his account of the life and ministry of Jesus by introducing his readers to a couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth who lived during the reign of Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1). Zacharias was a priest and both he and his wife were said to be "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (1:6). Although they were living in consistent obedience to God, Luke mentions that "they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years" (1:7). In this culture, barrenness was viewed as unfavorable and a curse upon a couple resulting from some type of sinfulness against God. From all indication in Luke's writing, it seems as if Zacharias and Elizabeth had learned to live with this circumstance even though others probably looked down on them and the couple continually prayed that God would give them a child if He so chose (1:13).

Continuing on with life as normal, Zacharias was faithful in fulfilling his priestly duties in the temple and "...according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense" (1:9-10). Burning incense in the temple was an honor for a priest and something which individuals only had the opportunity to do once in their lifetime. Each priest who was chosen to keep the incense burning would enter the temple in the morning and evening. When Zacharias approached the altar of incense, an angel of the Lord appeared and Zacharias became fearful until the angel said, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth" (1:11-14). The angel revealed to Zacharias that his son, John, would be used by God to "turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (1:15-17); in other words, John would call people to repentance so that their hearts would be ready to receive Jesus, the soon-coming Savior of the world (see Malachi 3:1).

In disbelief of the angel's words, Zacharias questions him saying, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years" (1:18). Even though he had prayed to God for this child (1:13), Zacharias did not truly believe that He could perform this miracle. As a consequence for his lack of faith in God to do what seemed impossible, the angel (Gabriel) declared that Zacharias would "be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place..." (1:19-20). When Zacharias finally emerged from the temple he was speechless and could not verbalize his conversation with the angel (1:21-22). Zacharias returned home after his temple duties had concluded and several months later his wife gave birth, so in an act of worship she "hid herself five months saying, 'Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people'" (1:24-25).

This real-life story must remind us that God is able to do the things we think are impossible. At times, we pray for something yet question whether God can bring it to pass. I am reminded of the words of James, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:6-8).

Dear God, help me to trust You to do the impossible when it is according to Your plan.