

INTRODUCE **SLIDE** ADVENT

Alright, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do,

- please grab them and turn to Luke chapter 1.
- You can open a phone or a tablet to Luke 1,
- or you can use one of the hard-backed black bibles
 - under every single chair.
 - You'll find Luke 1 on page **855**.

INTRODUCTION: ADVENT

Well, it's Advent...actually...technically it's not.

- Advent is a church season...
- observed during the four Sundays before Christmas.

But since Christmas Eve falls on Sunday this year...

- technically, Advent begins next Sunday...
- but I wanted us to have FOUR Sundays...
- PLUS Christmas Eve...
 - so save me your, "It's not officially Advent," emails....
 - I KNOW!

And this Advent we're going to be walking through Luke.

- Luke gives us pairs of characters,
- and that's how we're going to work through his account.
 - Joseph & Mary...
 - Mary & Elizabeth...
 - Simeon & Anna...
 - the Shepherds & the Angels.
 - And today, **SLIDE** ZECHARIAH & ELIZABETH

EXPLAIN: THEME

And in their part of the story we find the theme of DISAPPOINTMENT.

- I want to engage those who struggle to believe in God,
- because the way things have played out in life,
- have left them disappointed in God in some way.

What do you do when God seemingly disappoints you?

- All your friends are getting married right now, but you aren't.
- All your friends are getting jobs or promotions...
 - but it's not working out for you.
- Or you're approaching retirement and it's not looking good.
- Or maybe you're not having kids for whatever reason...
- Or your kids didn't turn out the way you thought they would,
 - and if you're honest, you're just angry about it.
- Or your marriage is a wreck...

If in any of these things, you're like,

"God, I don't understand how this can be your plan?"

Well, Zechariah and Elizabeth are going through that very thing.

So, let's go: Luke chapter 1, starting in verse 5:

LUKE 1:5-7

[5] In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [6] And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. [7] But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

EXPLAIN

There are a couple of things to note about Zechariah and Elizabeth.

- Zechariah was a priest.
 - So, there were an estimated 8,000 priests...
 - living in Palestine at the time.
- And note that they are described as:
 - righteous before God,
 - walking blamelessly.

Now, this certainly doesn't mean they were perfect.

- No! When the Bible says someone is blameless,
 - it doesn't mean they're sinless...
 - it means they trust in God with their sin.
- It means that their sins are covered,
 - and thus, there is no longer any blame for them.

But here's the rub in this text.

- They are blameless...
- BUT they had no child because Elizabeth was BARREN.

And this would have been their great **SLIDE DISAPPOINTMENT**

- She certainly would have borne children had she been able.
 - Children were a sign of God's blessing and God's favor,
 - and in a time before 401-Ks and IRAs,
 - children were an assurance you would be taken care of...
 - and that your family inheritance would be passed on.

And that's the dissonance in this text:

How could they be both BLAMELESS and BARREN?

- They would have been looked at as cursed by God.
- There was no hope for their future and their family inheritance.

TRANSITION

And you may not be struggling with literal barrenness...

- But do you have something in your life like this?
- Something you can't figure why God hasn't given it to you?
- Some DISAPPOINTMENT?

Verse 8:

LUKE 1:8-10

[8] Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, [9] according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. [10] And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

EXPLAIN: PRIESTS

So, of the 8000 priests...the incense lot fell to Zechariah.

- And this would have been the greatest moment...
- of Zechariah's priestly career.
 - Many priests never had the privilege to do this...
 - and no priest was allowed to offer it more than once.

So, Zechariah would make his way into the Holy Place in the Temple.

- Not the Holy of Holies, where the Arc was...but he could see it!

And in front of him was the golden altar of incense.

- And his job was to offer the incense
 - so that as his prayers went up to God...
 - they were wrapped in the sweet smell of incense.

But then something unexpected happened! Verse 11:

LUKE 1:11-17

[11] And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [12] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. [13] But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. [16] And 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 the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

EXPLAIN: ANGEL

In the very moment of the pinnacle of his career as a priest,

- an angel of the Lord appeared to him,
- standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And Zechariah does...

- what everyone in the Bible does...
- when they see an angel...he is terrified!
 - This is no: It's A Wonderful Life...
 - Clarence...moment!

No! We're about to find out that this angel is the Archangel Gabriel!

But the angel comforts Zechariah by saying, verse 13:

- "Do not be afraid...
- for your prayer has been heard."

EXPLAIN: QUESTION

Now, the question scholars debate is: What prayer is being answered?

- Because the set-up concerning Elizabeth's barrenness...
 - could mean Zechariah was praying for a child.
- OR it could be a reference to what Zechariah was praying for...
 - in his priestly duties as he lit the incense:
 - that is, the redemption of Israel.

Well, it seems more likely the angel is referring to the priestly prayer.

- Zechariah is asking God to redeem Israel...
 - to cast off the occupying Romans...
 - to help in the oppression of his people...

He's asking God to fix things...

But instead of fixing everything... God promises a baby.

- And never in Zechariah's wildest dreams...
 - would he have thought that an unlikely son...
- would ALSO be the beginning of the answer to his prayer...
 - for the redemption of Israel.

And what is Zechariah's response to such an angelic prophecy?

LUKE 1:18

[18] And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

EXPLAIN: DISBELIEF

Zechariah responds with **SLIDE DISBELIEF**

- He doesn't believe!

The angel answers the prayer for Israel, with a promise of a son.
And Zechariah doesn't believe him.

Now, WHY...why doesn't he believe?

- He's standing in front of an angel!
 - You ever say, "If God would just give me a sign..."
- Well, Zechariah is getting a sign for sure!

So, why doesn't he believe?

Listen, it's not because he's a skeptical atheist.

- No! He's a priest!
 - He knows the Old Testament stories...
 - of barren women being blessed with children.

It's not his skepticism. It's his pain!

This is the RAWEST, SOFTEST, MOST DIFFICULT part of his life!

- How long do you think Zechariah prayed for a child?
 - How many years?
- How long you think it's been since he gave up on that prayer?
 - You pray for a child in your 20s...
 - and in your 30s...
 - and maybe even in your 40s...
 - but not in your 70s or 80s!

You see, that's why I don't think he's praying for a child.

His wife is barren AND looks, he says she's too old to have kids!

- Verse 18: Zechariah says, **I'm old...and my wife...**
 - and then he uses a different Greek word...
 - **she's advanced!**

She's not old...

she's seasoned...she's experienced...she's mature...

It's a biblical euphemism! **She's advanced!**

- Cause Zechariah isn't dumb.
- It was inappropriate to call a woman old...even back then!

But hear me, they have long since given up on that prayer.

- Oh, he used to pray that prayer.
 - So, he prayed,
 - and he prayed...
 - all to no avail.
 - And now it hurts.

And the angel brings up that hurt...and Zechariah doesn't believe.

So basically, what's happened here,

- is this man who historically has had a great deal of faith,
- when pressed by God on the most sensitive place in his life,
- he is vocal about his disbelief that God could pull this thing off,
- and so, God rebukes him.

Verse 19:

LUKE 1:19-23

[19] And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. [20] And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." [21] And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. [22] And 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. [23] And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

EXPLAIN: DISCIPLINE

So the penalty for Zechariah's UNBELIEF...

- is that he was struck speechless.
 - We'll actually see that he loses his hearing as well.
- So, he's mute and deaf.

He would be confined to his own silent world.

- And for the nine months of pregnancy...
- he would have plenty of time to reflect on the situation.

His DISAPPOINTMENT...led to his DISBELIEF...

which has been met with God's **SLIDE DISCIPLINE**

EXPLAIN: PUNITIVE

Now, let me do a little work here for a minute.

Because people misrepresent that word, DISCIPLINE, all the time.

This word DISCIPLINE does not mean PUNISHMENT.

- The gospel says that God punished Jesus for ALL of our sin.

Which means, if you are a Christian,

- every ounce of PUNISHMENT for sin was put upon Jesus,
- and if God were to give one more drop of punishment for sin,
 - it would be unjust,
- because God would be demanding two punishments
 - for the same sin.

There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...

BECAUSE the full condemnation fell upon Jesus.

So, if you are a believer...

- God is NEVER '*paying you back*' for your sin...
- in the hardships of life.

See, I know Christians who feel like they live...

- under the curse of something they did years ago!

But Jesus absorbed ALL of the curse for you!

- He took all the punishment.
- Nothing is left for you but mercy.

So, in your pain he's not paying you back...

- he might be trying to bring you back,
 - but that is different.

Hebrews 12 says this:

SLIDE HEBREWS 12:7, 10-11

[7] It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? [10] For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. [11] For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

EXPLAIN: DISCIPLINE

The writer is saying:

- *"Hey listen, when God trains,*
 - *when He reprov*es,
 - *when He disciplines,*
- *it's not pleasant,*
- *it's painful!*
 - *But it's not PUNISHMENT.*
- *It's* **SLIDE DISCIPLINE**

It's not always chipper!

Christians say,

- *"God is Good...all the time..."*
- *and all the time...God is good"*

Right? And He is!

But sometimes it's like,

- *"God, this doesn't feel so good!"*

And you don't have to pretend to be alright. You hear me?

- **If you're not alright...**
- **the worst thing you can do...**
- **is pretend that you are.**

Listen, Jesus loved honest people...

- even honest people...
- who were so ashamed of what they were being honest about...
- that they couldn't talk to him...they could only sob.

"The broken and contrite in spirit, I do not despise."

APPLICATION: PARENTING

Now this illustration of training or disciplining children...

- can get lost in our time...
- because there's a fad going with some parents...
 - who have become convinced...
- that it is MORE IMPORTANT to let your child...
 - explore and figure out his or her identity...
 - than it is to train your child to maturity.

And if you're like, *"well, that's how I'm raising my child..."*

We know...ok? We all know!

And I get it...I want my daughter to like me.

I don't want her to just love me;

- I want her to like me!
- I want her to want to hang out with me.
- I want her to think I'm cool.
- I want her to like me!

But God's call on my life as her father is not, primarily, to be her friend!

- It's to have her best in mind...
 - even when it makes me unpopular with her.
- And that means that sometimes I'll look, to her eyes,
 - as the enemy.
- And sometimes I have to inflict pain...
 - because I love her.

LOVE and DISCIPLINE are synonymous.

- It takes a higher degree of love...
- to put boundaries around my daughter...
- for her own maturity and own safety.

TRANSITION

So, God is disciplining Zechariah...not as punishment...but in love!

And let's look down to what this leads to:

- DISAPPOINTMENT...
- lead to DISBELIEF...
- which leads to DISCIPLINE...
- which leads to what?

Oh, I'm so glad you asked!

Verse 57:

LUKE 1:57-61

[57] Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. [58] And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. [59] And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, [60] but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." [61] And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name."

EXPLAIN: BIRTH

Elizabeth will give birth.

- And all the friends and family are hanging out,
- and rejoicing because it's a miracle.
 - Not only was she barren in her early life...
 - but remember, she is advanced!
 - And when Grammy has a baby, we gonna party!

So, when it comes time to name the kid,

- they would've all assumed...
- she would name the child Zechariah...
 - after his father.

That would have fit with tradition.

- But she says, "*no, he's gonna be called John.*"

And all of Elizabeth's crew are like,

- she really IS advanced!
- "Hey sweetie, no one has that name in your family!"

Verse 62:

LUKE 1:62-66

[62] And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. [63] And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. [64] And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. [65] And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, [66] and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

EXPLAIN

So, you've got Zechariah who's walked for decades of DISAPPOINTMENT.

- He believes that God is good,
- He believes that God is merciful,
- He believes all these things about God,

And yet God never answered his prayer about a son.

And then finally, when God sends him an angel...

- when he's told it's possible...
 - Zechariah doesn't believe it!
- and God lovingly DISCIPLINES him.

But now he's had time to wrestle...

- with the shame,
- and the frustration,
- and the feelings of stupidity.
 - All the things that accompany you...
 - when God busts you in the middle of your DISBELIEF.

And what is Zechariah's response after 9-months of DISCIPLINE?

He busts out of that cocoon with...

- "His name is John!"
 - He obeys God...and his DISCIPLINE subsides.

And what's the first thing out of his mouth when his tongue is loosed?

Pent up worship explodes out of Zechariah's mouth!

- So, I'll keep with the D theme, and say **SLIDE DELIGHT**.

Literally, bro starts singing. Look at verse 67:

LUKE 1:67-69, 76-79

[67] And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

[68] "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people

[69] and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,

And down to verse 76:

[76] And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

[77] to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,

[78] because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high

[79] to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

APPLICATION

- The purpose of God's DISCIPLINE...
- is to lead you to overflow with DELIGHT.

Some of you HAVE been disciplined.

Some of you ARE being disciplined.

But I want you to know that God's doing it in love.

- He wants you to learn to love and trust him.
 - I know it feels painful,
 - I know it feels like it's destroying you!
- But his intentions are your healing...
 - not your destruction.

His intention is your ultimate DELIGHT.

CONCLUSION

So, what I want for us to get from the story of...

SLIDE W/PADS ZECHARIAH & ELIZABETH is this:

- I want us to learn to trust the GOODNESS OF GOD.

Oh, what I wish for you is that I could convince you of the love of God.

- That even when he breaks your bones...
- and shuts you up in silence...
 - it's because he desires your salvation...
 - not your destruction.

Out of this pain...God is ushering in the salvation of the world.

- And he's up to something in yours as well.

I wish you could realize that the love of God flows over you right now...

- and that you would just resign yourself completely to him...
 - to cast yourself fully upon him.

There are many ways to be barren. What is that for you?

What is the RAWEST, SOFTEST, MOST DIFFICULT part of your life?

Well, I'm going to plead with you to believe this...

- God is more about your good than you are.
 - Did you hear me on that?
- You know how I know that?
 - Because no one has hurt you as deeply as you have.
- God is MUCH more about your good than you are.
 - And there's something that occurs in disappointment...
 - that brings us into holiness.
 - There's something about the discipline of the Lord...
 - that detaches our love from the things of this world,
 - and makes us more and more like Jesus.

Maybe when we are in those places...

- where God presses on the rawest nerves in our lives...
- when He disciplines us when we disbelieve...
- or when He confronts us in our ignorance...
- or when He wounds us in our strength.
 - When the business starts to fail...
 - when the marriage gets difficult...
 - when we don't understand the calamity...
 - when disease infects the body and isn't going anywhere...
 - when sorrow enters our life...

What if these things aren't happening to us because God is angry with us?

- Or punishing us?
- Or distant from us?
- Or unable to help us?

But, what if they're happening...

- because God loves us TOO MUCH...to save us from them?
 - What if in them God is displaying His deepest mercy?
 - What if he is putting his goodness on display?

Maybe that's what this Christmas is for in your life...

- Look to ZECHARIAH & ELIZABETH!
- And learn to trust in the GOODNESS OF GOD.

Let's pray.

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES CONSULTED:

- Bock, Darrell L. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Luke 1:1-9:50.
- Greear, J.D. *Surprise*.
- Hughes, R. Kent. Preaching the Word. Luke.
- Murch, Andrew. *Divine Intervention*.