



**Honest Advent – In the Stillness**  
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**The Crossing Church**  
**Las Vegas, Nevada**

### **OPENING**

In our second week of Advent we are looking at the value of silence in a noisy world. Silence is such a tension – it feels so awkward and yet we seek it. We like noise, we need noise, we add noise – noise is not just volume just as silence is not simply quiet. Silence is the absence of distraction. But it is also revealing and forces us to be real.

### **SCRIPTURE<sup>1</sup>**

**Luke 1:10-13** And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.” “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be SILENT and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.” Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

**Luke 1:57-58, 62-64** When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

**Phil 2:6-7** Who, being in the very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

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<sup>1</sup> The NIV translation unless otherwise indicated.

## **OBSERVATION**

The Christmas story and those involved is nothing if not a story of vulnerability. Mary's perspective is told in the Gospel of Luke, but before hers, he brings us the story of Zechariah, a rather ordinary priest. Gabriel appeared to him beginning the conversation with a common "angel to man" statement: "Do not be afraid." Zechariah questioned Gabriel who was announcing the birth of a child to be named John (the Baptist) by asking, "How can we in our old age have a child?" He is rewarded by being silenced for the duration of the pregnancy. The interesting thing is the noise continued around him, but he couldn't add to it. He was forced to listen, forced to process, forced to a most vulnerable place. He had to sit in his silence. This is where the possibility of transformation begins.

**QUESTION: Why do you think Zechariah was silenced when he questioned Gabriel, but Mary wasn't?**

For 400 years, the time between Malachi and Matthew, God had been silent. And now He begins, in His proper time, to roll out His plan. God broke into His silence, molded Zechariah within his silence which tells us that God can do some of His best work in us through silence.

**QUESTION: Why do you think God was silent for 400 years?**

**QUESTION: During your devotions, how much time do you spend listening to God? What is the longest time you have been silent before God?**

## **APPLICATION**

Jon Fosse, Norwegian poet and author, wrote: "In a way, it is the silence that speaks. To speak is precisely what silence should do. It should speak, and we should talk with it, in order to harness the potential that is present. Perhaps it's because silence goes together with wonder, but it also has a kind of majesty to it, yes, like an ocean, or like an endless snowy expanse. And whoever does not stand in wonder at this majesty FEARS it. And that is most likely why so many are afraid of silence and why there is music everywhere." The fear that Fosse expresses is getting to know ourselves better within the silence and what that means as far as the needed response, because the word we can set right alongside silence is vulnerability! This means to open up ourselves, to strip away the protective layers and reveal our deepest core. Healthy Vulnerability is about acknowledging the truth and showing the courage to actually change and grow, about accepting responsibility, being honest, expressing empathy and facing uncertainty are not weaknesses.

**QUESTION: When in your life have you felt most vulnerable?**

Vulnerability will bring a new level of honesty we need and a new level of opportunity we have never seen. Be aware, however, that it is deeper than honesty which is a catalyst toward the truth – but, it doesn't produce change. Vulnerability is a catalyst toward transformation, but it is dangerous in the wrong hands. There are trusted, seasoned friendships that come alongside the work God is doing in us, but it begins with us silencing ourselves and becoming vulnerable to Him. This is the power of silence, the possibility of vulnerability and the potential for transformation.

**QUESTION: Who are your most trusted friends before whom you can be vulnerable? Is there someone who trusts you to keep his/her confidences?**

The Christmas Story tells us something incredibly profound about who God is – it is shining a very bright light on God that we can easily miss. Jesus’ incarnation and birth is an example of His greatest moment of vulnerability. He had “come from heaven and emptied Himself and made Himself nothing.” He showed us what divinity looks like. Jesus’ decision to lay aside His divinity demonstrated what divinity looks like – a giving, not a getting. God’s character is expressed through what He gives and not what He gets. When God chose to reveal Himself, He did so through a human body. He was touchable, approachable and vulnerable. There was not one person who considered Him too holy or too divine to touch. If we choose to keep Him strictly divine, we are choosing to keep Him at a distance. Yes, we approach Him with great reverence, but remember: We are not God’s bother or burden – we are His **beloved**.

**QUESTION: In what ways do you think you would be transformed into the image of Jesus if you spent more time listening to Him?**

#### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, allow our silence to bring us closer to You as we listen to Your heart for the journey You have planned for us. In this Christmas season, speak clearly to our hearts as we are transformed into people You can use. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

#### **QUESTIONS**

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**QUESTION: Why do you think God was silent for 400 years?**

**QUESTION: During your devotions, how much time do you spend listening to God? What is the longest time you have been silent before God?**

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