



ADVENT: THE COMING OF HOPE

Luke 1:5-25
November 27, 2022

Be sure you have read through the passage before discussing the questions with your small group. Also, you can watch or rewatch the sermon by going to <http://switzerlandcommunitychurch.org>

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. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. 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. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 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. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 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."

And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 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. 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." And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. 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. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

- Luke 1:5-25, ESV

ADVENT 2022: THE COMING OF HOPE

Thanksgiving was great and now we kick off one of my favorite times in the church season, the Season of Advent. Throughout church history the purpose of advent has been lost. We think it's a time to talk about little 8lb 6oz baby Jesus. We sing some Christmas Carols, hear how Jesus is born and go home. Yet, the purpose of Advent as it began in the rhythmic seasons of the church points to the second coming of Jesus Christ by looking at the promises in His first coming. This advent, as we go through the story of the birth of Christ through the Gospel according to Luke, specifically the first two chapters, we look forward to the promise that Jesus Christ is coming again.

Thus, we come to the start of the Gospel with the pronouncement of a pregnancy that defied all odds. People had been found faithful in the eyes of God and yet could not have a child. Luke, here, starts off his telling of the Gospel not with the announcement of the coming Jesus but of the coming of John The Baptist. We know the future of this man, he would be the voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord! Yet, in this moment, we see the first announcement of a miraculous birth.

The coming of Advent looks at the birth of the Savior and the hope he brings. When we engage only in the mundane without the expectation of the miraculous of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension as a greater miracle and His coming again as a greater future miracle.

LOSING HOPE THROUGH THE MUNDANE

- *Luke 1:6-9 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.*
- Zechariah and Elizabeth are described as genuine and walking blamelessly. This does not mean that they were sinless obviously, but that their character stood out as fundamentally different.
 - Zechariah, a priest had been selected to minister in the temple in a specific way, offering the incense and caring for the temple.
 - He offered up the customary prayers that you would offer in this circumstance, praying faithfully as a priest would.
 - But he was old childless in a day when you would have been looked down upon for not having any heirs.
- His prayers, though, ministering in the holy place, was not a prayer of crying out to the Lord.
 - The text would likely have been more specific that he prayed earnestly for a child.

- Or worse, as some commentators have put it, he was doing the thing that we all are guilty of. We pray for something because we know we should be we stopped believing God would answer it a while ago.
- A halfhearted prayer that sincerely doubts that God is even paying attention, not that God doesn't care but asking the question from a deep pain of the heart, is God even there?
- *Proverbs 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.*
 - A sick heart is not one that lashes out in aggression or spills out.
 - The heart is the place of passion, of desire, and of our wants.
 - Hope deferred, then, leads to a sick heart that just gives up.
 - It's the person who no longer wants to get out of bed in the morning because what is even the point.
- A sick heart is one that has lost all hope that things might get different so you just aimlessly go about your life with no real expectation of anything good.
- For many it starts with the anger of trying to coerce God into giving you what you ask.
 - We view God as this transactional being who owes us something. We feel that our own works have somehow merited the blessing of God.
 - Zechariah and Elizabeth were blameless in their action and yet childless. They would have walked in a specific type of disgrace in their culture, viewed as having a difficulty because of sin. But no one could say that of Zechariah or Elizabeth.
 - We did all the things God asked so why didn't God do His part?
 - Listen, if that's the prayer you have, you go right ahead and pray it. Angry at God? Get angry to God. Some days He will respond with the rebuke of Father to a child and others with the warm embrace of a Father to a child, but both will be done as a Father. Give God what you got. Because to continue down this road is much worse.
- We settle for the mundane. We settle for the life of get up, work, eat, go to bed, and completely miss out on the abundance of joy that comes from living a life in the impossible.
- We trade the miraculous for the simple mundane
 - The Pharisees and the priests did this time and time again. Forsaking the idea of any type of miracle, they sought rules for living to be their guide.
 - The outward actions became their guiding star as they lived a life that only that could live, striving under their own ability to live it.
 - We trade the miraculous life, one that abides in being plucked from the hands of death and set on our foundation of eternity, we trade this for a life devoid of purpose and meaning.

Yet, it wasn't just Zechariah and Elizabeth who had given up hope, it was the nation of Israel. For years the prophets had spoke of the coming Messiah. The spoke of the one who would come to save and redeem His people. Then, for 400 years, the time between the Old and New Testament events, the prophets stood silent. God did not speak in the manner He

once did through the prophets. The people of God had chosen to live in the mundane, heart sick and without hope. In the middle of the mundane, in the middle of the time when hope burst through.

GOD REMEMBERS AND DELIVERS ON HIS PROMISES

- *Luke 1:13-17 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. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 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. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 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."*
- The angel appears to Gabriel with the first command "Do not be afraid" which is entirely understandable given that Gabriel was supposed to be in there alone with only one way in.
- After that, though, is the promise that God has not only heard the prayer but that God is working through it.
 - Elizabeth and Zechariah will have a child despite the physical impossibility of doing so. The immediate prayer would be met by God.
- Yet, the promises of God far exceeded that of even Zechariah. The child would be the one proclaiming the good news of the coming Messiah. He would be used by God throughout all the nation to proclaim the coming of the Messiah.
 - For a time that had given up hope that God would even speak to them again, seeking only their own self-actualization and landing only in the mundane, hope burst through like a ray of sunshine through the clouds.
 - The hearts of the fathers will be turned to their children. The hearts of the previous generations will be on the future rather than simply on themselves.
 - They will begin to look forward in hope that life will continue greater than when they first began.
- But for Zechariah, hope did not immediately return. He saw the miraculous right before his eyes and responded not with a hopeful joyous response, but with a challenge. "According to what?" would be a better translation of his response of how. It's a challenge, not a statement of belief.
 - For Zechariah, so much time had gone by that the promise of life seemed like a far off impossibility.
 - The angel stands before him and Zechariah still responds with doubt rather than hope.
 - The timing had been all wrong in the eyes of Zechariah.
- *2 Peter 3:8-9 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*
 - For us, the timing of God's work can often seem like the wrong time. We think that God can't possibly follow through with His promises because it didn't happen in exactly the moment we think.

- We create a transactional approach to God thinking that if we just behave a certain way, that God is obligated to give us what we ask for.
- God's ways, though, are not our own, and He is not slow in fulfilling His promises. He fulfills them precisely when He means to.
- Hope, then, rests in the faithfulness of our God, not in our ability to coerce or earn the love of God.
 - When we rest in the coming of Hope, we rest in the faithfulness of God to do what He says he is going to do.
 - He will complete His work. We do not. God does. God chooses to work through us to accomplish His work but the impetus is on God to complete it.
 - If we believe that God is able to do all things, then that changes our prayer life and our hope to move beyond just a simple wishing but to a hope that leads to action.
- Furthermore, God is able to do immeasurably more than we think.
 - The angel did not just announce the coming of John the Baptist but of the Savior of the world who would be announced by John the Baptist. The vision and plan of God goes far beyond whatever we may think we need or want.
 - Hope submits to the goodness of God to provide good gifts for His children as a perfect Father does for theirs.

The coming of Jesus represents the coming of hope. Hope for a people who had long felt sick and dismayed in their hearts. Hope for those who thought there would be no way and hope for those who could not see the provision of life that comes from the Father.

HOPE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

- *Luke 1:18-19* And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 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.
- Whatever you are facing, we can stand firm in the hope that comes from God alone because He is able to do all things.
- Zechariah met the angel with questions demanding an explanation. Gabriel, though, returned with the strength of standing in the authority of God.
 - I am Gabriel.
 - I stand in the presence of God
 - I was sent to speak to you and bring you this good news.
- Every statement he makes affirms that the presence of God lays the foundation of hope for the people.
 - Gabriel is not appealing to his own ability or his own strength, though it is clear throughout scripture he has both. Rather, he looks to the higher power even to him.
- Hope comes from knowing who we are as we abide in Jesus Christ, the Savior and the Messiah.

- *John 1:12-13 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*
- We can stand in the miraculous because we have been claimed as children by the One, True God who does the impossible.
- Our hope of life is in the coming of Jesus Christ who brings hope to the dead by restoring them to life.
- Hope comes from standing firmly in the presence of God.
 - Being in the presence of God transforms and shapes us to reflect His nature. All throughout scripture we have seen even the vague clouded presence of God leave people, like Moses, physically different.
 - Now, as the Spirit of God indwells within us and the presence of God transforms and shapes us, we can have hope knowing that no matter what we do or where we go, God is with us.
- Hope comes from knowing the message of the Gospel that cannot be conquered.
 - *Romans 5:3-5 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*
 - Even in the face of difficulty, we can have hope in the Gospel that Jesus Christ came, lived, died, resurrected, and ascended into heaven.
 - Nothing is too big that the Gospel has not put it to shame.

We can have hope of the miraculous because we know that the miraculous has already come. We no longer need to abide in the mundane but can live in the hope that shapes our lives to view the world different. God desires life to not just continue but to thrive. Pray then, knowing that you are speaking to the one who does the impossible and makes a way where there is no way, not being afraid to earnestly pray bold God-sized prayers but also to submit boldly in those prayers to the King of the Universe who loves you deeply. Live, knowing that, as you abide in Jesus, not even death can touch you and that you will be with Jesus for all eternity. Stand firm in the hope that even in the face of trial and difficulty and disappointment, that Christ is victorious against all the obstacles of the world and that He has already placed all things under his feet.

Discipleship Group Guide for Sermon Talk Back

Open in Prayer

Open up your gathering in prayer. Ask that God would reveal His word to you and move in and through your conversation to transform and renew you to glorify Him.

Read Luke 1:5-25

Have someone in the group read Acts 1:5-25 together. After reading it, ask to see if anyone has any immediate questions or observations from the text.

Discussion Questions

1. How is the character of God revealed in this passage? What do the actions of God reveal about His character?
2. Describe what Zechariah and Elizabeth are going through as a couple. How do you think their prayer life progressed in asking for a child? How does their life mirror the life of the people of Israel throughout the quiet intertestamental period?
3. What happens to someone when they lose hope? What happens when the heart is sickened?
4. The angel Gabriel sought to bring hope to the people of God. How does his proclamation to Zechariah and Elizabeth give hope to the people? What is meant by the statements that the child would turn the hearts of fathers back to their children?
5. When we have hope in the coming Messiah, what changed in our life? How does life in Christ transform us experience the miraculous, even in our day to day?
6. Where in our life have we needed to experience the hope that comes from true life? In what ways does the coming of Jesus Christ bring us true, authentic life? How is this different than the life we attempt to live on our own?

Prayer Requests

Challenge for the Week

Advent is a time to look at the second coming of Jesus Christ by looking at His first. As we celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ, we know that He brings hope with Him. This week pray that God would fill you with life abundantly to experience the hope of living fully in Christ.