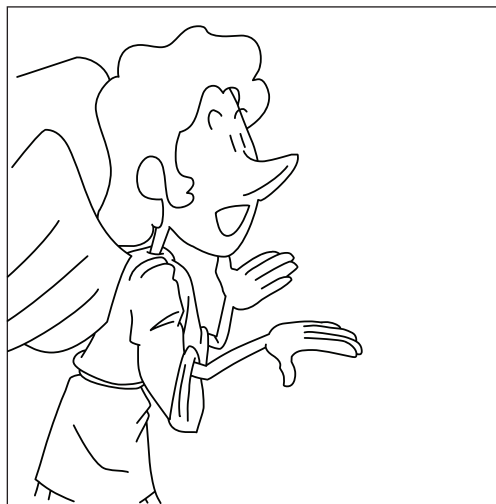


Zechariah

receives a promise



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Luke 1:11-20

Zechariah was a priest. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were unhappy because they had not been able to have children. And now they were both quite old. One day, Zechariah was performing his priestly duties in the temple and...

All at once an angel from the Lord appeared to Zechariah at the right side of the altar. Zechariah was confused and afraid when he saw the angel.

But the angel told him: "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayers. Your wife Elizabeth will have a son, and you must name him John. His birth will make you very happy, and many people will be glad. Your son will be a great servant of the Lord. He must never drink wine or beer, and the power of the Holy Spirit will be with him from the time he is born.

"John will lead many people in Israel to turn back to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord with the same power and spirit that Elijah had. And because of John, parents will be more thoughtful of their children. And people who now disobey God will begin to think as they ought to. That is how John will get people ready for the Lord."

Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know this is going to happen? My wife and I are both very old." The angel answered, "I am Gabriel, God's servant, and I was sent to tell you this good news. You have not believed what I have said. So you will not be able to say a thing until all this happens. But everything will take place when it is supposed to."

Commentary

The dramatic story of how God stepped into the world in the person of Jesus Christ begins here in the innermost part of the temple, with an elderly priest called Zechariah. He shouldn't really have been surprised that an angel appeared to him. It was part of what he believed in and taught to others, but sometimes we can end up going through the routine of prayer and no longer expecting God to answer us, and certainly Zechariah didn't really seem to believe the tremendous message given to him. He and his wife were elderly and the idea of having a son seemed beyond belief, never mind the fact that this son would have a special job to do to bring people back to God and prepare the way for someone even more important.

The angel's visit literally leaves him speechless until the child is born. Zechariah couldn't believe what he was being told, despite his own faith in God, but God still used him to father John—later known as 'the Baptist'—who would point the way to Jesus as God's way of speaking to the whole world.

Questions

- ▶ Do we just go through the motions of prayer sometimes, and is that why we aren't really ready to hear God speaking to us?
- ▶ What was Zechariah's son going to do, according to what the angel said?
- ▶ Why did Zechariah doubt the angel? Is it always wrong to have doubts?
- ▶ What do you think the angel looked like?



Visual aid

It was behind the curtain in the Temple that Zechariah had the surprise of his life. If you can draw the curtains near to where you are reading this, take turns to hide a surprise item behind them. Can the others guess what is hidden each time?



Activity idea

Zechariah wasn't able to speak after this encounter until John was born. He would have had to use sign language. Use the internet to learn some proper sign language for key words in the story, such as temple, curtain, worship, God, surprise, baby, family and parents. You could also play a game of charades, using a form of sign language to try to describe something that happened to you recently.



Prayer idea

God interrupted Zechariah's prayer with a visit from an angel. How ready are we to let our prayer be broken into by God? Pray a familiar prayer together, such as the Lord's Prayer, pausing for a while after each line to give space for God to speak to your heart.

Key verse

John will get people ready for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

Old Testament story link

Judges 13:1-20: An angel appears to a husband and wife and promises them the gift of a special son.



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