

The Annunciation Of John

Luke 1:5-25

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We are entering into the church season that is called Advent. It's four weeks leading up to Christmas. The word "Advent" means "coming" or "visit." It's anticipating the coming of the Lord. It's fascinating to realize that we, as believers, live between the two comings—the first Advent and the second Advent, or the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We are looking back and anticipating the celebration of our Savior's birth.

Why have I chosen Luke 1 for our text? The answer is that Luke is the most chronological and comprehensive of the four Gospels. It starts earlier in the Christmas story than any of the other Gospels, whether that be the synoptics—Matthew, Mark and Luke—or the Gospel of John. It goes all the way back, starting with the annunciation of John and ends with the Ascension of Jesus. It starts with the annunciation of the forerunner's birth, and it ends with the Ascension of the Savior back into heaven.

Luke has been called—even by critics of the Bible—the most beautiful book in the world. I certainly concur with that; it's won my affections. Anyone who has studied the Gospel of Luke has fallen in love with this Gospel. I am tempted to go into the background of Luke in great detail, but we're here not just to study Luke but also the events leading up to the birth of our Savior.

Luke wrote his Gospel with the skill of a historian, the care of a physician, the songs of a musician and the insights of a theologian. It's a beautiful Gospel. It's the Gospel that also talks about women, has more parables, talks more about prayer and presents Jesus as the Son of Man. Mark says Jesus is the servant, Matthew says that He is the Messiah, but Luke says that Jesus is the Son of Man.

Luke, as the historian, gives us the time and setting of our Savior's coming into the world. Verse 5 says, "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea..." So this is the historic setting and time of the forerunner's coming into the world before the Savior's birth.

This Herod mentioned in verse 5 was known as Herod the Great. He was the first of several rulers from the Herodian dynasty. After him would be several more Herods. He ruled from 37 to 4 BC. He was an Edomite, a descendent of Esau. He was ruthless, wicked and cunning. He was a vassal of Rome who ruled the Jews with savage tyranny. He actually slaughtered his own family, because he was paranoid that they would take his power, rule and authority. When Jesus was born, it was the same Herod the Great who had all the male babies of Bethlehem three years old and under slaughtered. He was a very, very ruthless man. So these were dark days for Israel.

It's interesting that the light shines brightest in the darkness. Before the coming of the dawn of Messiah, it was a very dark world. They were living under the oppression of the Roman

government. But now the light is starting to shine with the annunciation of the forerunner of Messiah, John the Baptist.

It reminds us that no matter how dark the world gets, God always has a witness. Sometimes I get discouraged when I watch the evening news and see the condition of the United States. All the perverted things that are going on in our nation. But then I realize that God has given us a lot of Christians in this nation. On Sunday mornings, all over the United States, Christians are gathered in churches just like this one.

Jesus looked at His disciples—and I believe He looks at us—and said, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” We are to be “a city set on a hill,” so that others can see that light. As far as our nation is concerned, it’s a very dark time, but we, as believers, are the salt and the light, so we need to shine, especially at Christmas, for Jesus Christ. I think we should get very aggressive and proactive in telling other people the meaning of Christmas. We should be willing to tell them about Jesus’ birth and Jesus’ coming and who He was. It’s a great opportunity, as everyone is thinking of this time of year, the Christmas season, so we should share the Gospel.

Our story, or text, is a long one and has three movements. I want to give them to you, and they will unfold as we go. The first movement is verses 5-12 and is the supernatural appearance. We first have a supernatural appearance of an angel to Zacharias, a priest who is in the temple offering prayers and incense. It says, “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well stricken in years.” That’s King Jimmy for “over the hill.” We say over the hill; they say “well stricken in years.” I think that’s kind of cool. I’m old; I’m well stricken in years.

“So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot...”—that is, “Zacharias’ 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.” By the way, we don’t know what time was the time of incense, but the people were waiting outside for Zacharias to come out to pronounce the blessing. “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him...”—this is the supernatural appearance—“...standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.”

I want you to notice the persons first involved in this story. There is the priest, Zacharias, verse 5, and his wife, Elizabeth. He was of the course or division of Abijah. What does that mean? The priesthood was broken into groups or courses. They were put into 24 groups. So many priests but only one temple, so they had to take turns doing their service in the temple. Once a year, for one week, they would come to the temple, and they would perform their service. Elizabeth was also of the daughters of Aaron. It was a double blessing; Zacharias, as a priest,

was a Levite, and he married a wife who was also a Levite from the tribe of Levi.

Their names are significant. Zacharias means “God has remembered.” The name Elizabeth in the Hebrew is Elisheva, which means “God is my oath.” When you take their two names, Zacharias and Elizabeth, and put them together, you have “God has remembered His oath” or “God has remembered His promise.” How significant that these two people came together, and it is a reminder to us that God remembers His promises to us. It is going to be one of the dominant themes in the text we will cover today: “God remembers His promise” or “God keeps His promise.”

As I anticipate Christmas, that is one of the things that fills my heart with joy: God promised a Savior, and God sent the Savior. He has come. And just as He came the first time, He will come the second time. What God has promised, He will fulfill.

So Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous, walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. They were blameless. So there are two people in this story who are key: Elizabeth and Zacharias. Notice verse 7. “But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren...”—Elizabeth was now past the age of child bearing—“...and they were both well advanced...”—or “stricken”—“...in years.”

Now let me drive home some points of application. It is interesting to note that the righteous do suffer. Notice that “they were both righteous before God.” They were “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” This doesn’t mean that they were sinless, but it means that they were pious or devout. We use the word “piety.” They were very devoted to keeping God’s commandments. They loved God. If they sinned, they were quick to offer a sacrifice to get right with God. So as best they could, under the Old Covenant, they were a devoted husband and wife to the things of God.

But Elizabeth was barren. One of the greatest reproaches a woman could ever have in those days was not to bear children. It’s not the issue today in our culture that it was back in that day. Back then, you wanted children. Children are a gift from God. Children are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is His reward. It was assumed that if a woman was barren, God was judging her, or God was against her.

But the point I want to make is that the righteous do suffer. You can take that to the bank. Just because they were right before God, just because he was a priest, just because they were serving God, just because they were doing the commandments and ordinances of God, it doesn’t mean they were immune from the sorrows and sufferings and hardships of life. You are deceiving yourself if you think, Well, if I go to church, if I pray and I love Jesus, if I’m a good person, then nothing bad can happen to me. It’s not so. The Lord will be with you. He’ll help you. He’s got a purpose. He’s got a design. But there are no Christian fallout shelters. We’re not immune from getting sick like other people. We’re not immune from bereavement or loss or cancer or having no children or miscarriage. These things are a common lot in life, so we suffer even as the unrighteous. We need to remember that. J. C. Ryle said that “The grace of God

exempts no one from trouble.”

But the point I want to make is that Zacharias and Elizabeth still loved and served the Lord. They didn't abandon their faith. They didn't say, “Well, okay. I'm not going to go to church. I'm not going to serve the Lord anymore. I'm not going to follow the Lord.” So the righteous do suffer, but they continue to serve God. And verse 6, they were both walking in the ways of God, keeping His “commandments and ordinances.”

If you're suffering today, God knows. God understands. He has a purpose and a plan. You need to keep your heart right with God. You need to continue to love God and serve God and follow God. Maybe you think He hasn't answered your prayer, or God hasn't done what you wanted Him to do. God hears and does answer prayer. We need to trust Him and continue to serve Him.

You need to remember that this whole trial of Elizabeth's barrenness that they were going through was part of God's purpose and plan for their lives. I believe with all my heart that if you're a child of God, nothing can come into your life but what God is in control of and God allows. We may not understand it. We may not like it. We may not understand what God's plan or purpose is. But that's what it means when the Bible says, “The just shall live by faith.” It's trusting God. It's believing in the darkness, when I can't see and I can't feel and I can't hear His voice and I'm wondering, Where is God? It's walking by faith and not by sight and not by feeling. It's knowing that God is with me and God is in control.

I think about this story of Zacharias and Elizabeth. They were priest and Levite, devoted to God, but they were experiencing one of the greatest reproaches a Jewish couple could ever have; they were barren and had no child. But it was all part of God's plan and timing. God was going to give them a baby boy. God was going to answer their prayer in His time and in His way. Here is the deal: this whole time they had no idea what God had in store for them. They had no idea when God's timing would come. They had no idea of the blessing to come. They had no idea that their story would be recorded in the Gospel of Luke for us to read today.

Can you imagine if they knew that? Zacharias would have said, “Elizabeth, don't be discouraged. We're going to have a son, and he's going to be pretty great too. As a matter of fact, the Savior or Messiah's going to say that there's never been one born of woman greater than our son, John the Baptist. He's going to be in the ministry. He's going to be used by God. It's going to be in God's timing, and it's going to be recorded in the Gospel of Luke and they're going to read about us for years to come.” They didn't know that.

And you don't know that. So don't get discouraged. Don't give up. God has a purpose and God has a plan. It takes living your life to be able to look back with that perspective. I sometimes forget this, but I've been around long enough that when I have a disappointment, I have to remind myself that it's God's appointment. My disappointment is God's appointment. He's got a time, He's got a place and He's got a will. He's got something better, if God says “No,” or if God says, “Wait.” I've learned that we can trust God that His timing is perfect, that it's

all part of God's plan.

W. Graham Scroggie said, "On the hearth of their hearts, lie the ashes of a dead hope. But these were soon to be kindled again into a joy of parenthood." I love that. Their hopes lay in ashes, but God was going to kindle their hopes again and give them this promised son.

Notice the occasion in verses 8-10 of when this visitation took place. It says, "So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord." That one week of the year they would cast lots. You would be chosen for a particular task. Zacharias' task was one of the highest honors a priest could ever have. It could only happen once in a lifetime, and not all priests had this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be the one to go into the holy place, stand before the veil separating the holy place from the holy of holies. There in front of the veil was an altar of incense. He would place the incense on the altar and offer his prayers before God. Then he would turn and exit. The people were waiting outside, and he would pronounce the blessing on them: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee and cause His face to shine upon thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." This was a once-in-a-lifetime privilege, and Zacharias was doing this in the temple, offering this incense.

Notice what happened, verses 11-12. It was a supernatural encounter. As Zacharias was doing this work of lighting the incense and praying, "Then an angel of the Lord..."—who is Gabriel, as it says in verse 19. There are only two angels named in the Bible, Michael and Gabriel. So this angel "...appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him."

Now we don't yet get what the angel came for. But in the Jewish mind, whenever an angel appeared it could mean that you would be judged by God. These are holy angels, and Zacharias, knowing that he was a sinful man, was fearful and trembled.

Years ago I was a brand new Christian and up on a mountain somewhere praying. I had been reading my Bible about angels, and remembering my immaturity and lack of understanding, I prayed, "God, I want to see an angel!" And the minute I was praying that, in a bush behind me a big lizard made a noise. I found out it was a lizard afterwards. It scared me to death! I freaked out. I thought I was going to see an angel, but I turned around and saw a lizard. But I wasn't disappointed. I said, "Never mind, Lord. Never mind. If I'm that scared about a lizard, I do not want to see an angel!" To this day, I've never prayed again to see an angel.

So many times when an angel would appear, people would freak out. It's kind of like Casper, the friendly ghost. They're nice guys; they're just there to give you a message. But you freak out. And Zacharias has this appearance of this marvelous angel.

But the point I want to make is that this is breaking what's called the 400 silent years. This is the breaking of the 400-year silence between the end of the Old Testament in Malachi and

the beginning of the story of the Savior in the New Testament. It doesn't mean that God didn't speak, that God wasn't doing anything. It means there was no revelation from God, no clear word from God. Malachi 3:1 says, "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me." This is the fulfillment of that. And when Zacharias was praying, no doubt he had been praying for God to send the Messiah, the Savior, the deliverer of the world.

Now we move from the supernatural appearance, verses 5-12, to the second movement of the story, verses 13-17, or the prophetic utterance. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard..."—so the angel immediately calmed his fears—"...and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John." That's a beautiful, beautiful name. The name John means "God is gracious." My name is John Paul, and my grandmother always used to tell me, "Johnny Paul, live up to your name. You've got a good name. Live up to that name." She's gone to be with the Lord in heaven, but I've done my best to keep her commandment and live up to that name.

His name was given to Zacharias; "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John" or "God is gracious." "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth." What joy we have when we have children. What joy children bring. "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb..."—how amazing is that!—"...And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also 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 a people prepared for the Lord."

So number one, God promises, verses 13-14, a son. God always keeps His promises. God promised in the book of Malachi that there would be a forerunner. There is also a prophecy of John in Isaiah 40:3-4 that John would be "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.'"

In the ancient world, whenever the king was out riding on a road, they would have someone before him preparing the road, smoothing out the road. So John the Baptist was the forerunner of the King. He was preparing the way by preaching repentance to the people and turning their hearts back to the Lord. The Jewish nation had turned away from God, but now they would be turned back to God by the preaching of this young boy, John the Baptist.

God always hears our prayers. I love verse 13: "Your prayer is heard." People are always saying, "Well, pastor, I prayed, but God didn't hear my prayer." Yes, He heard your prayer. He just didn't answer it the way or when you wanted. God hears our prayers. The Bible says that if you are practicing sin, "The Lord's hand is not shortened...neither His ear heavy," but your sin has separated you from God. God hears your prayers, but He's not going to answer your prayers, because there is sin in your life. So if you know there is sin in your heart, you need to confess it to God. Once you confess it, He has forgiven it, and we know that we have the ear of God. We know that we can trust God.

When I cry out to God, I know He hears me, I know He loves me and I know He will answer in His way and in His time what He deems to be best. Father knows best. I can trust Him. So God's delays are not His denials. So often we pray for our loved ones, and we pray for years and years and years and we're ready to give up. The Bible says, "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." God finally answered Zacharias and Elizabeth's prayer. John's birth would bring such joy. Someone said, "No children cause such true joy as those that have the grace of God upon them."

Notice the character of this forerunner, John, as mentioned in verse 15. "He will be great in the sight of the Lord." I suggest to you that's what true greatness is. True greatness is not greatness in the sight of man. True greatness is greatness in the sight of the Lord, where God sees our hearts. And then he "shall drink neither wine nor strong drink." It's a good idea for a pastor or a minister not to be drinking, not to get drunk especially. Here he said that he would actually fulfill the requirements of a Nazarite. It doesn't mention his hair, but the Nazarite vow was that you would abstain from wine and strong drink. There seems to be a differentiation here between the wine and the strong drink. Neither one of them was he to touch.

So he was to be a man who has a heart right with God, he needs to be set apart unto holiness and thirdly, verse 15, he shall "be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." Is that amazing or what?

By the way, think of the implications for abortion. When we say, "It's just tissue, or it's just a fetus or it's not a real human being," that's not true. This is a real human being. People say, "Well, a woman should have the right over her own human body." Yes, but not over someone else's body. Those are not her hands. Those are not her feet. That's not her heart beating. Those are not her eyes. Those are not her ears. Those are not her internal organs. That's a separate body.

And that little John, in the womb of Elizabeth, would be filled with the Holy Spirit. I call him "the Pentecostal in the womb." He's jumping up and down, the little Spirit-filled Pentecostal baby in the womb. He's praising the Lord. How cool is that.

John would be raised out in the wilderness, and he would eat wild honey and locusts as his diet. He wore a camel-skin coat, and he would go out and preach repentance. The crowds would come. And he eventually would even baptize Jesus and say about Him, "Look, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world." And Jesus said, "Among those born of women, there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist" because of the privilege he had.

So think about it: Elizabeth and Zacharias thought God has forsaken us. God has abandoned us. God hasn't answered our prayers. God, why have You let this happen? And all this time God had been waiting for the perfect time to give them this awesome privilege.

Don't be discouraged. Don't give up. God has a plan. God has a purpose. God will open a door. You just have to trust Him and wait on Him.

So John and his character are predicted by the angel. Then his ministry is described in verses 16-17. It says, "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah." In the book of Malachi 4:5-6, it says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." That's the closing of the Old Testament.

Some people get confused and say, "Wait a minute. You said this is John the Baptist, but Malachi said it would be Elijah." It has a dual fulfillment. The first fulfillment was in John the Baptist, who would come "in the spirit and power of Elijah." The other fulfillment would be before the Second Coming, as Malachi said, before "the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Before the Second Coming, during the time of tribulation, during the time of Jacob's trouble, Elijah will appear. I believe he's one of the two witnesses in the book of Revelation. The other one likely is Moses. Moses and Elijah appeared on the mount of transfiguration, and I believe they'll appear before Jesus comes back in His Second Coming. It was prophesied that John would have an Elijah-like ministry. Then 400 years later, it was fulfilled.

Verse 17, "He will also 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 a people prepared for the Lord."

By the way, that prophecy, referring to Jesus, when it appears in the Old Testament and it uses the word "LORD," it's in all capital letters. That means "Jehovah" or "Yahweh." Then that prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus. Thus, Jesus is Jehovah. Jesus is the Lord God, of Whom the forerunner would prepare the way.

Now the last, or third, movement is found in verses 18-25. It's called the unbelieving silence. This is where the story gets very fascinating. An angel shows up and tells Zacharias that he's going to have a son, he's to be named John, he'll be great, he'll be a fulfillment of prophecy and he's going to prepare the way of Messiah. Notice Zacharias' response to this. "And Zacharias said to the angel, 'How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.'" It's like, "Really Zacharias? You're talking to an angel!" An angel shows up and says that he's going to have a son. "I don't know about that." Excuse me?

And I love the response: "And the angel answered and said to him, 'I am Gabriel...'—the name Gabriel means "strong one of God"—"...who stands in the presence of God..."—he just came from God. "You questioning what I have to say?"—"...and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." So Zacharias' statement, "How shall I know this?" was a statement of unbelief. It was made clear in verse 20, which says, "...because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." What God has spoken cannot be broken. God keeps His promises.

Verse 21, “And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple...”—they perceived correctly—“...for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months...” So during the early days of her pregnancy, she kind of hid herself. You know, when you’re over the hill and you tell people you’re expecting, they’re going to think, You need to be institutionalized! So she just thought, I’ll just wait until I’m showing, and then I’ll say, ‘Surprise!’ That would blow people’s minds. They probably had fun with that one. Then in verse 25 Elizabeth said, “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

The big lesson in this whole passage is Zacharias’ unbelief. As a matter of fact, today and the next three times, we’re going to see four different responses to the coming of Messiah. Four different ways people responded to Jesus’ birth. The first response was unbelief. The angel Gabriel said, “You’re going to have a son.” He told Zacharias about John’s ministry and his character, but Zacharias said, “Uh, I don’t think so.” If I were to paraphrase what Zacharias said in response to the angel, it would be, “I don’t believe you. I don’t believe it. Have you looked at me? My wife and I are over the hill. We’re past the years when we can have children.” It’s funny because he probably prayed for this for so many years, but now he’s given up hope.

Isn’t it funny that we pray for something, and when God answers our prayer, we don’t believe it? Wow! Maybe you forget—because it’s been so long—that you asked God to do something, that when He does it, you don’t even recognize it. And Zacharias said, “I can’t believe that. I don’t believe that.”

Well, number one, he should have, because he knew Scripture; that God had done it before. Remember the story of Abraham and Sarah? They were past the years of bearing children, but God gave Sarah a child, Isaac. Zacharias should have known his Bible, and we should know our Bibles. We should know the Scriptures. We should familiarize ourselves with the Scriptures. We should say, “If God did it before, God can do it again.” If God answered prayer, if God saved, if God delivered, if God healed, if God provided, if God did it before, God will do it again.

And he prayed. The Bible says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.” You won’t receive anything from God lacking faith. So when you pray, you need to pray in faith.

Then Zacharias was given the message by an angel, yet he doubted the word of Gabriel. Do you know that God takes unbelief very seriously? Unbelief robs us and closes our mouths. Israel wondered in the wilderness for 40 years and couldn’t enter the Promised Land because of unbelief. Unbelief will rob you of the joy of experiencing God’s blessings in your life.

In closing, verses 21-25, the people were waiting outside. As I said, the priest would come out of the holy place and bless them. So they were waiting and waiting and looking at their watches, wondering, What? Did this old guy get lost in there? Has he forgotten that he's supposed to come out? And, verse 22, "But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless."

It's very possible, by the way, that Zacharias lost his hearing as well as his speech. Later on in Luke 1:62, when John was born and they wanted to know what his name would be, they had to make signs or signals to Zacharias asking him what the baby's name would be and to write it on a tablet. So some believe that there is good reason to believe that perhaps he lost not only his ability to speak but also his ability to hear. He was shut up in his own little world for nine months. What a story; he remained speechless.

Can you imagine when he came out of the temple and the people were expectant? He did a Charades thing or pantomimed. How do you relate this? "My wife's going to have a baby. I know she's over the hill, but the angel just told me so. And the reason I can't talk is because I didn't believe it." Amazing.

Then, verse 23, "So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house." Think about that. For nine months he didn't get to talk to his wife. He had to listen to his wife for nine months. [Not if he was deaf.] I'll stop right there. You don't believe me? You have to listen to your wife and can't say a word. Nine months he couldn't say anything and couldn't enter into the joy of what was happening. Amazing. He could write obviously, so I'm sure he and Elizabeth were writing to communicate with each other.

"Now after those days, his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, 'Thus the Lord...'—she knew that it was from the Lord—"...has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

What a beautiful story this is. God always keeps His promises. Unbelief shuts our mouths, but belief, as in Elizabeth's case, opens our mouths and gives us praise. In Jeremiah 32:17, it says, "There is nothing too hard for the Lord."

Do you believe that? Do you believe that God can heal your marriage? Do you believe that God can save your children? Do you believe that God can provide your mortgage or rent? Do you believe that God can heal your body? Do you believe that God can open the door that "no man can shut"? Or that he can "shut doors that no man can open"? Do you believe that God loves you and that He will answer your prayers in His good time and in His good way? You can trust in the promises of God. Zacharias so missed out because he just didn't believe what God had said.

God has given us promises in His Word. And as you approach Christmas this year, know that God promised that He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever

believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Do you believe that? If you trust in Jesus and you put your faith in Christ, then you pass from darkness to light; you have the life of God in your soul. What an awesome thing that is.

“God, help us to believe and walk in faith, no matter how dark things get around us.” God loves us and hears our prayers. He answers prayers, and He always keeps His promises.