

TO TELL THE STORY



LUKE ITALIANO

The Months of Silence

The cool air inside the temple chilled Zechariah's old bones. He shuffled over to the altar of incense, the bells at the edges of his robe tinkling as he walked. And he lit the incense.

And cried out in fright.

There was someone in the temple with him. He was supposed to be alone. No one was supposed to be in the Holy Place!

And then a greater fear gripped him. It was an angel. And the angel spoke: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayers have been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah gasped, and he asked, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

The angel seemed to change in front of him: from pure joy to wrath. "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you 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 proper time."

And then, Zechariah was alone. The only sound was the soft hiss of the incense burning: a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord. A quiet sacrifice to the Lord.

He turned to the curtain that led outside, to the crowd that awaited his blessing. How could he go out there now? He looked around again.

No. The angel was gone.

He shuffled to the curtain. He pulled it aside. The bells at the bottom of his robe tinkled. He raised his hands to bless the assembly. He opened his mouth.

No sound came out.

Nothing.

He returned to his home. Soon enough, his wife Elizabeth, his old wife Elizabeth, well past childbearing years—she was pregnant!

But he couldn't share his joy. He couldn't laugh in joy. He couldn't speak in joy. It had to stay bottled up.

He couldn't talk, because he didn't trust.

He had to watch his wife Elizabeth as she was so careful and went into seclusion. He watched her belly grow. He felt the baby kick.

And he couldn't talk.

And finally the day came. And he held his breath. How could a woman as old as his wife give birth? How could she stay healthy? How could she give birth to a healthy child? And yet —

The young voice cried out. And Zechariah's heart leapt.

He was a father!

The child was healthy. And his wife Elizabeth was healthy. And he couldn't talk!

Eight days later: time to circumcise the child. And give the child a name.

And his wife Elizabeth, holding the baby, her eyes proud – she spoke for them. “His name is John!”

And the relatives frowned. “No! No! You need to give him a name... You need to name him after Zechariah! After his father! His proud father!”

And Elizabeth? She put up such a fuss that they finally turned to Zechariah. “Tell her! Put her in her place!”

But nine months of having no voice had forced Zechariah to learn to listen. With trembling hands he took a stylus and wrote, “His name is John.”

And just like that, his tongue was loosed. And all the joy and all the praise that had been bottled up for months overwhelmed him, and he prophesied: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come, and he has redeemed his people.”

And he picked up little John, his little face scrunched up in pain from the surgery. “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Brothers and sisters:

Yes, Christmas is just around the corner. There are so many voices to listen to, and it's so easy to try to shout to make yourself heard.

Instead, listen. Listen to what your God tells you:

To those living in darkness, a light has dawned.

Take the time to listen to God's Word. Really listen; not - not just in a nodding way, but hear what he has promised to you.

He has promised you his Son.

And see as he keeps that promise.

And this story is true.

Luke 1:5-25; 57-80
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