



**READ:** Luke 1:5-20 (NIV)

During the time [Herod] was ruling, there was a priest named Zechariah. He belonged to a group of priests named after Abijah. His wife Elizabeth also came from the family line of Aaron. Both of them did what was right in the sight of God. They obeyed all the LORD's commands and rules faithfully. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was not able to have any. And they were both very old. One day Zechariah's group was on duty. He was serving as a priest in God's temple. He happened to be chosen, in the usual way, to go into the temple of the LORD. There he was supposed to burn incense. The time came for this to be done. All who had gathered to worship were praying outside.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah. The angel was standing at the right side of the incense altar. When Zechariah saw him, he was amazed and terrified. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will have a child. It will be a boy, and you must call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you. His birth will make many people very glad. He will be important in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or other such drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will prepare the way for the Lord. He will have the same spirit and power that Elijah had. He will bring peace between parents and their children. He will teach people who don't obey to be wise and do what is right. In this way, he will prepare a people who are ready for the Lord."

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is old too." The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I serve God. I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will have to be silent. You will not be able to speak until after John is born. That's because you did not believe my words. They will come true at the time God has chosen."

**ENTER THE STORY:**

For 400 years, God had been silent with his people. No dreams, no visions, no messages, and no visits from angels or prophets. This made his people very sad, but everything was about to change. It was FINALLY time for God's promises to become a real, and it all started when an angel showed up in the temple to give Zechariah a message from God.

*Have you ever had to rub your eyes to see something better? I wonder if Zechariah had to do that when he first saw the angel. He must have been surprised! Remember - nobody had seen or heard from God in a really long time.*

God sent Gabriel to tell Zechariah that his prayers had been heard and that he and Elizabeth were going to have a baby! Just like Abraham and Sarah, this baby would be born to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age and would be a blessing to many people.

*Their son would pave the way for God's promise to Abraham to come true...that one of his future, great, great, great-grandsons would bless the whole world.*

**BUT WAIT!** There was more! Gabriel also told Zechariah that his son would be like the prophet Elijah and would help the people get their hearts ready for Jesus!

It was all starting to happen. The promises from the Old Testament were unfolding right before his eyes, but sadly, Zechariah did not believe it would really happen. As a result, Gabriel told him that he would not be able to speak until after his new baby arrived.

**This all came true!** When Zechariah's promised child finally arrived, he made sure to do just as Gabriel told him. He named the baby John, which means "Yahweh gives good gifts."

- Zechariah and Elizabeth were so happy when their baby arrived, but there was another promised child coming soon.
- This child was promised to Eve, and to Abraham, and to David many years earlier. They had been waiting a LONG time for this child, but they would not have to wait much longer.

• *Do you remember who the promised child of Abraham was? It's Jesus! It's always been about Jesus!*

- This is EXACTLY what we celebrate at Christmas! The wonderful gift of God. He loves his children so much that he is willing to do *ANYTHING* to rescue them, even if it means sending his own Son into our story to meet us where we are.
- Presents and toys are nice, and they might give us happiness for a few moments, but the best gift we could ever receive is Jesus!

• **PRAY:** *God, thank you for giving us the best gift we could ever receive this Christmas. Help us believe in him and love him with all of our hearts. Amen.*