

# When God Breaks Through

Luke 1:5-25

It was a dark time in the nation of Israel. There had been no prophet from God nor word from God in 400 years since the time of the prophet Malachi. The spiritual leaders of Israel were shackled by tradition and, in some cases, corruption. The king, Herod, was a tyrant. He was not even Jewish, but an Idumean (Edomite) appointed by the Roman senate as a client king.

In the midst of the darkness, God sent a message to an ordinary person going about his daily business. God was going to send a child who would prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah.

God doesn't look for the rich, famous, and powerful. *He chooses ordinary people who are righteous and holy and invites them to join him in his work of salvation.*

## **John the Baptist's parents (5-7)**

Herod the Great ruled over Judea from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C.

Zechariah and Elizabeth both had a priestly heritage. They were an older, childless couple.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were godly people. When they sinned, they confessed it quickly and were faithful to obey God's commandments.

## **The angel's announcement to Zechariah (8-23)**

King David had divided the priesthood into 24 divisions and placed the leader of one priestly family at the head of each group (1 Chronicles 24:10; 2 Chronicles 8:14). There were approximately 18,000 priests in Judea. All priests served during the three major festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles). They also served during two other weeks during the year when they carried out the daily temple sacrifices and rituals.

The priests cast lots to determine who would offer incense at the daily sacrifice, morning and evening (8-9). Some might never have the privilege, while some might do this once in their lifetime. For Zechariah to be chosen was the greatest honor of his priestly career. It was the closest a non-high priest could get to the Holy of Holies.

Since a great crowd gathered to pray (10), this is most likely the afternoon sacrifice. The assigned priest and two assistants carried burning coals from the great altar into the chamber of the Holy Place to burn incense on the altar of incense. It was located in the center of the room before the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The assistants then withdrew, leaving the priest alone in the sanctuary, when he would lay the incense on the coals and prostrate himself in prayer.

As Zechariah is performing his duty, an angel appears (11-12). Zechariah reacted with shock as it was most likely the first supernatural person he had encountered face to face.

The angel announces that God has heard Zechariah's prayer (13). Had Zechariah been praying for a son? Had he been praying that God would send the Messiah? Either way, Zechariah's son would be an answer to both of those prayers.

Since God was the one giving Zechariah and Elizabeth a son, God took the initiative to name the child, John.

The angel detailed six aspects of John's character and ministry (14-17):

- He will be a joy and delight (14)
- He will be great in the sight of the Lord (15)
- He is never to take wine or other fermented drink (15)
- He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth (15)
- He will bring many people back to God (16)
- He will go before the Messiah (17)

Instead of simply believing, Zechariah asks for a confirming sign (18).

The angel gives Zechariah a sign, but it costs him nine months of inconvenience and embarrassment (19-20). The angel helped Zechariah understand the seriousness of his mistake by explaining who he was—Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God.

Zechariah's delay in the temple, and then his inability to speak, impressed the worshippers in the temple that something supernatural had occurred (21-22).

Zechariah returned to his home in the hill country after his service ended (23).

### **The pregnancy of Elizabeth (24-25)**

Elizabeth conceived and went into a self-imposed, five-month period of seclusion. She gratefully acknowledged God's grace in removing the shame of her childless condition.

### **Principles to Practice**

God is looking for ordinary people who are available and willing to join him in service.

Zechariah raised doubts about the angel's message. Sometimes even good people have doubts about God's promise.

Elizabeth took her burden to God and rejoiced when that burden was lifted.

Are you willing to respond to what God calls you to do?