

FPFWC Christian Development



God's Preparation

December 2022

Fall Quarter

December 3, 2022

Lesson #1 – Zacharias Hears from God

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Luke 1:8-20

ICE BREAKER –

1. How can doubts be overcome?
2. How can we handle our fears?

Key Verse – “The angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”—Luke 1:13

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Gospel of Luke is one of two Gospel accounts that describe Jesus’ birth and its context. The other account comes from the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 1:18–2:23).

Luke’s account is distinct in at least two ways. First, Luke’s account is interwoven with events regarding the birth of Jesus’ cousin John (Luke 1:5–25, 57–80). Both pregnancies were announced by an angel (1:13, 30–33), were accompanied by great wonders (1:62–66; 2:13–15), and had prepared the people for God’s salvation (1:32–33, 67–79).

Second, Luke’s account highlights the significance of these parallel birth narratives through depictions of worship. Mary (Luke 1:46–55; see lesson 4), Zacharias (1:67–79; see lesson 2), a heavenly host (2:13–14), and Simeon (2:28–32) all give praise to God for His work.

Luke’s account opens by way of introducing Zacharias, the father of John and a priest in the division of Abia (Luke 1:5). Zacharias and other priests descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses (see Exodus 28:1). Over the centuries, Aaron’s descendants became numerous to the point that they could not all serve in the temple at the same time. King David had organized the priests into 24 divisions for service (1 Chronicles 24:1–19). The divisions required adjustment following a season of captivity (see Ezra 2:36–39). These divisions apparently continued into the New Testament era.

Every division would serve in the temple for roughly two nonconsecutive weeks each year. The assigned priests would complete the necessary tasks for the temple, including accepting and offering sacrifices, burning incense, and leading prayers.

Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth, also a descendent of Aaron, were “righteous before God” and “blameless” regarding obeying His commandments (Luke 1:6). The couple was without children due to their ages and Elisabeth’s barrenness (1:7).

LESSON COMMENTARY

Zacharias's Priestly Service Interrupted (1:8–12)

1:8–10. Now it happened (“It came to pass”) was an obvious way to advance the story. Zacharias continued to go about his regular duties **performing his priestly service before God** according to the regular schedule (1:8). Luke noted that at this time Zacharias was given a special opportunity (1:9–10). Due to the large number of priests serving in that day (as many as 18,000), not every priest could expect to serve in the inner chamber of the temple itself. The honor of this service was determined by lot twice each day, at sunrise and sunset. A priest would consider it the high point of his career, and it was never conferred twice on any one man. It was at this time, in the service of a humble priest offering the daily incense in the temple, which had been done day-in-day-out for decades, that God chose to break His silence and advance His program of salvation.

1:11–12. While he was engaged in this special service, an angel appeared to Zacharias (1:11). The detail that the angel was **standing to the right of the altar of incense** was something only Zacharias himself would have known, an indication of the care and detail of Luke's research. Perhaps the angel stood there as an answer to Zacharias's prayer. The **altar of incense** was one of the furnishings of the temple symbolizing the prayers of the people. Zacharias was **troubled**, and **fear gripped him** (1:12), an appropriate and reasonable response. The appearance of an angel was as unexpected in Zacharias's day as it would be today.

b. The Angel's Message Delivered (1:13–17)

1:13–14. The angel's message to Zacharias had six parts: (1) a word to calm him, **do not be afraid**; (2) a word to encourage him, **your petition has been heard**; (3) a word of joyful news, **Elizabeth will bear you a son**; (4) a word to instruct him, **you will give him the name John**; (5) a word about his personal joy, **you will have joy and gladness**; (6) a word about the joy for many outside his family, **many will rejoice at his birth**. It would have been clear to Zacharias that this birth was significant beyond being the end Elizabeth's barrenness.

1:15–17. The message of the angel about John Himself (1:15) indicated three particulars: The angel indicated that John (1) would be great, (2) would drink no wine, and (3) would be filled with the Holy Spirit. In short, John would be a unique figure—unmistakably devoted to a unique and powerful ministry for the Lord. The angel's message about John's ministry in 1:16–17 indicated five facts about John's ministry: Note facts #1 and #4 are related; facts #2 and #5 are the same; fact #3 is at the center and is a key “salvation historical” fact that said in effect, “Get ready! God is about to once again take up His program with the nation and advance His plan of salvation.” (1) John's ministry will **turn many ... back to the Lord** (1:16)—it will be a ministry of leading people to repentance. (2) John **will go as a forerunner before Him** (1:17a, emphasis added)—it will be a ministry of preparation for the Messiah. (3) John will serve **in the spirit and power of Elijah** (1:17b)—it will be a ministry of power and prophetic fulfillment. John will (4) **TURN**

THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS ... and the disobedient ... (1:17c; cf. Mal 4:6)—it will be a ministry of “reconciliation between families that occurs through the ministry of reform” (Bock, *Luke*, 88). (5) John will **make ready a people prepared for the Lord** (Lk 1:17; cf. 2Sm 7:24)—it will be a ministry of preparation of the people to respond to the “Lord’s way of salvation” (Bock, *Luke*, 91). Thus the angel indicated John’s ministry would be empowered by God, undertaken in behalf of others, and focused on Christ—a pattern for all Christian service.

c. Zacharias’s Doubt; Angel’s Reassurance and (Mild) Rebuke (1:18–20)

1:18–20. Zacharias’s doubt was not serious but was notable in contrast to Mary’s humble acceptance and instant submission (cf. 1:26–38). Those who enjoy the Lord’s promises most assuredly are those who take Him at His Word most readily. The angel was **Gabriel** (cf. Dn 10:13, 21). Zacharias was assured that Gabriel knew whereof he spoke since he was one **who stands in the presence of God** (Lk 1:19a) and such announcements were apparently his special ministry. Zacharias ought to have been focusing on the divine “promise” of the message, not the human “problems” of the message. For his doubt Zacharias would be **silent and unable to speak** until the promise was fulfilled. This would serve both as a sign of the angel’s verity and a rebuke for Zacharias’s incredulity.

LESSON NUGGET – His disappointment at not having a son did not keep Zacharias from serving the Lord. Be faithful; you never know when God’s angel may arrive. Zacharias had the faith to keep on praying; But when the answer came, he did not have the faith to accept it. He looked at his limitations rather than God’s great power. Unbelief produces silence (Psalm 116:10; 2 Corinthians 4:13); faith opens your mouth in praise to God.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*