



**"Your Prayer Has Been Heard"**

**Luke 1:5-20, 57-64 (NRSVUE)**

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***<sup>5</sup> In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup> Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. <sup>7</sup> But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.***

***<sup>8</sup> Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. <sup>10</sup> Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. <sup>11</sup> Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him.***

***<sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. <sup>14</sup> You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.***

**He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.**

**<sup>16</sup> He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”**

**<sup>18</sup> Zechariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” <sup>19</sup> The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. <sup>20</sup> But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”**

**<sup>57</sup> Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup> Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.**

**<sup>59</sup> On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. <sup>60</sup> But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” <sup>61</sup> They said to her, “None of your relatives has this name.” <sup>62</sup> Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. <sup>63</sup> He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed. <sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.**

It was in the Divine order of God, that the way of God's incarnate Word, the word made flesh in Jesus Christ, be prepared by a voice crying in the wilderness. One called John. We find in Luke's gospel, the account of this forerunner's birth.

A priest, Zechariah, went into the temple to perform the task of the priestly office and to burn incense on the altar of God. There were about 20,000 priests at that time and it was to be each one's responsibility to, once in their lifetime, enter the temple and light a flame and burn incense unto the Lord.

Now, incense isn't just some sweet-smelling smoke. Some folk take incense, and use it as deodorizer, to cover up other smells, but incense, temple incense like frankincense and sandalwood produce a sweet-smelling aroma and transforms a space to prepare and invite the presence of God in that place. Incense represented and symbolized the presence of God in that place. For Zechariah, this was no ordinary act, but an extraordinary; extra-ordinary occasion and experience in his life and in his ministry.

Every now and then God has a way of breaking into our mundane existence and providing *us* with extraordinary experiences. We don't expect them; we cannot really prepare for them; we don't always know what they mean, or how they happen; or why they happen. Only that they are mysteriously real. We're going about our regular routine; and we have an encounter with God; and God through some person; some experience, gets our attention; opens our eyes and minds; *speaks* to us and lets us know that we are a part of a larger plan that God has ordained for our lives. In what way and where have you seen God recently?

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar incense. And this divine messenger told Zechariah, "Your prayer has been heard; the petitions you have uttered, the desires that you have made known to God; the cries that you have cast unto God have been heard by God. Elizabeth, even in her old age, will have a son and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and people's lives will be changed and redirected; he will be the forerunner of the Messiah. He will bear witness of the light to come. He will not be the light, but will prepare the way for the light, who is Jesus Christ. His name will be John, which means the grace of God.

Zechariah stood there in utter awe and disbelief because Zechariah was looking at his situation and circumstance through his finite, limited eyes, and not through the eyes of God. Gabriel, had to tell him don't you know who I am. I am Gabriel, who stands in the very presence of God. I am Gabriel, my name means, "Strong Man of God." I am Gabriel, sent directly from God to give you good news.

But Zechariah was like some of us and doubted and did not believe. He said, how will I know? I need some evidence; I need some proof; I need a sign. How will I know? I know that God is omnipotent; all powerful. I know that God is omniscient; all knowing. I know that God is omnipresent; all present.

How will I know? Gabriel told him that for nine months, you will not be able to speak. What a pronouncement to a priest, who pronounces and announces the Word of God to God's people. For nine months, while Elizabeth is pregnant. For nine months while John is gestating and developing in Elizabeth's womb. For nine months, while God is planting John's mission and purpose into John's spirit, so that when he leaves the

spiritual realm and enters the earthly realm, he will remember his calling and purpose. Zechariah, for nine months, you won't be able to say a word.

Zechariah, you will have nine months to ponder how the supernatural has met the natural; nine months to ponder how the extraordinary has met the ordinary. Nine months later, their son was born and at his circumcision, the people were about to name him Zechariah, after his father, but Elizabeth said his name will be John, and they called upon Zechariah who wrote J O H N on a tablet, to confirm what God had told him nine months before.

And immediately his tongue was loosed, he was able to speak and he praised God. He offered a hymn of praise that is called the Benedictus or song of Zechariah.

vv. 68-79.

*"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,*

*for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.*

**69** *He has raised up a mighty savior<sup>[a]</sup> for us*

*in the house of his servant David,*

**70** *as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,*

**71** *that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.*

**72** *Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,*

*and has remembered his holy covenant,*

**73** *the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,*

*to grant us*

**74** *that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,*

*might serve him without fear,*

*75 in holiness and righteousness  
before him all our days.*

*76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

*77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.*

*78 By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon<sup>[h]</sup> us,*

*79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Sometimes we look at our situations, and we can only see them through *our* eyes. We see darkness, and God sees light. We see desperation and despair, and God sees deliverance. We see loss and defeat, and God sees victory. We see oppression and opposition, and God sees opportunities to manifest God’s-self and make God known in those impossible situations.

Just when you think you can’t make it; just when you think you can’t go on any farther; just when you feel like giving up and throwing in the towel; God steps in; sends a Gabriel to us, a divine messenger; to say, “*Your* prayer has been heard.” You prayed for healing; your prayer has been heard. You prayed for a job; your prayer has been heard. You prayed for comfort; you prayed for peace; you prayed for understanding; you prayed for patience; you prayed for perseverance; you prayed for protection; you prayed for perseverance; ***Your*** prayer has been heard!

Beloved, on this second Sunday in Advent, your prayer has been heard!  
In this season of expectation and anticipation, your prayer has been heard!

This is also a season of waiting. Waiting for salvation to come. Waiting for deliverance to come. Waiting for the Christ child to come. Waiting for hope to come; waiting for peace, joy and love to come. Let us be patient in our waiting; let us be faithful while we wait. For your prayer has been heard.

Let the Church say, "Amen."