

## Elizabeth's Example and Zechariah's Curse

Scripture: Luke 1:5 – 20

To start our Advent sermon series during which we will look at different characters from Jesus' birth story, let us look at Elizabeth's Example and Zechariah's curse.

Even before Pentecost, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Even before everyone else received the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth had the Holy Spirit inside of her. In a time of political uncertainty, Elizabeth was focused on obediently following God. In a turbulent time, Elizabeth still obeyed God. She gave thanks to God for her pregnancy which occurred late in her life. She recognized the holy purpose of Mary's pregnancy and she welcomed Mary into her home for three months.

Think about our world today? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? In these times of political uncertainty, are you focused on being obedient to God? In our turbulent times, are you still ready to obey God? Elizabeth gave thanks for her life and the holy purpose of Mary's pregnancy; do you give thanks to God for your life and for the gift of Jesus Christ?

Elizabeth knew the Hebrew Scriptures because her husband was a priest. She had faith in God and was waiting expectantly for the fulfillment of prophecy. When it seemed like God was silent, Elizabeth waited quietly. When God brought huge change to her life, Elizabeth was ready to accept it obediently. Elizabeth was a good example for us!

We know the story of Advent and Christmas because it has been told to us many times. Do we have faith in God as we wait for Christ's second coming? When it seemed like God is silent, do we wait quietly? When God brought huge changes to our lives, are we ready to accept it obediently? Is Elizabeth a good example for us?

We can have peace in our minds and hearts when we know that God is sovereign and God's plans are unfolding. We are blessed to have God's Word. We are blessed to have the presence of the Holy Spirit. We can respond to life's circumstances with obedience and faith. We can respond to everything in life with obedience and faith. Like Elizabeth, we can rejoice over God's eternal plan. Like Elizabeth's example we can receive the joy and hope of this Advent season.

'When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.' When we hear the Advent story, may our heart leap and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We struggle to keep silence. It is all we can do to sit through an hour long worship service that involves singing and spoken word. We want to talk to our neighbors next to us or behind us. We become twitchy and fidgety. We check our cell phones. We mess with our bulletin. We dig in our purse for a cough drop. We can not remain silent. The silence of worship is very difficult!

In Millville PA which is a Quaker community, I attended two Quaker worship services and found them quite relaxing, especially the first half – let me explain.

In a Quaker service there is no organized order of service. If someone has something to say, they stand up where they are and begin talking. The worship leader stood up at the beginning of the service and announced that the service has begun.

During my first Quaker service, no one spoke for 55 minutes! I attended the service with four people from the MCC (DOC). We did not bring anything to help us with the silence. I found myself praying a lot in the first half hour, it was very moving, but the last 25 minutes were excruciating. They had a clock on the wall which made a ticking sound and during the last half of the service, I thought the clock was ticking louder and louder! I felt like I was in an Alfred Hitchcock film.

Finally someone stood up and shared something about his life and God. Then the Quaker worship service ended – one hour and 15 minutes long.

My second Quaker service with four other people from the Millville CC (DOC) went much better because I told everyone to bring some reading material with them to help them with the silence. Also three people got up and shared their faith in Jesus Christ.

Silence can be difficult!

Meanwhile in our every day lives, we are filled with traffic jams and paving projects that upset us. At home, we fill our time with the noise TV. In a crowded store, we are fight for our place in line. The silence of life must be filled with something!

When the angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his - not exactly twenty year old wife - would bear a son, Zechariah hesitated to believe the good news. When the angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his old wife would bear a son, Zechariah hesitated! Zechariah began to question the angel Gabriel. Zechariah moment of none belief causes the angel Gabriel to tell Zechariah that he will not be able to speak for nine months. Interesting – nine months?

How often do we hesitate when we hear good news? How often do we face wonderful news and shrug our shoulders in disbelief? How often do we hesitate at the possibility that something good could happen in this world? How often can we not believe God's blessings for us?

Zechariah's result for his hesitation at good news from the angel Gabriel was that he was stricken silent for about nine months. He was stricken silent so that he would not say anything else. I can only imagine that Gabriel did not want this aging father to pollute the miraculous pregnancy with nay saying. I can only imagine God did not want to hear Zechariah's speculation.

So, what is the result of our hesitation at good news, especially the good news of Advent? Are we struck silent so that we do not say anything? Does an angel of God want us to be silent so that we will not become a naysayer of God's glory?

Let us talk about you personally - What is the result of your hesitation at good news, especially the good news of Advent? Are you struck silent so that you do not say anything? Does an angel of God want you to be silent so that you will not become a naysayer of God's glory?

Was it a blessing or a curse for Zechariah? Was this imposed wilderness of wordlessness for Zechariah a blessing or a curse?

Often we can not make it through two minutes of silent prayer, are we cursed like Zechariah? What might we learn in silence? So when you get home, for 10 minutes, put down your iPad, put down your phone, and put down the TV remote and sit in silence. Wait, in the blessed stillness of God!

I would like you to do this each day during this first week of Advent! Sit for 10 minutes in silence so that the stillness of God may find you.

Let us pray:

Lord God, we give you praise because you are sovereign and you have provided salvation for us through your Holy Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to be faithful followers like Elizabeth. Help us to be obedient children like Elizabeth.

God, teach us to keep silent at times. Let us speak to you in our waiting time and space in our lives. Tell us of your joy during this Advent season. Let us wait patiently for the arrival of the greatest news the earth has ever received. AMEN.