

**"God Breaks the Silence"  
(Luke 1:5-25)  
Pastor Woohyun Jung  
November 29, 2015**

**(Luke 1:5-25 NIV11-GK)**

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<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. <sup>14</sup> He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. <sup>16</sup> He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the 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 asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

<sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. <sup>22</sup> When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

<sup>23</sup> When his time of service was completed, he returned home. <sup>24</sup> After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. <sup>25</sup> "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Core Value: Christmas is about God breaking the silence to fulfill the promise that has been made to us – the salvation of mankind. We must trust that God is sovereign and in control over all things – and He will answer and act in His perfect timing. Christmas, then, calls us to hope again.

Opposing Values: We continue to doubt as we look to our circumstances.

## INTRODUCTION

I want to begin by pointing out that **today begins the season of Advent**. The word “*Advent*” comes from a Latin word “*Adventus*” which means “*coming*” or “*arrival*.” Then during this season, we’re waiting and anticipating for the coming of Jesus Christ. **Christmas, then, is all about receiving Jesus** – to know that the waiting is over and we get to experience the fullness of His presence in our lives right here, right now. If you think about it, there should be **a sense of excitement in having to receive and meet the person you’ve been waiting for so long**. A few months ago, Alicia went to New York with her friends for a few days just to rest and meet her old friend. I thought I would be okay but I realized that I missed her a lot more than I thought I would. My life felt so mundane without her. I couldn’t wait to have her back. She was scheduled to arrive back on Monday so I woke up early to vacuum the house, do all the laundry, organize the house, and think of nice places to go eat. And then I get a call from Alicia – she said, “My flight is delayed because of a snowstorm and I won’t be coming home today. I’ll be coming home tomorrow.” I was so excited to see her at one moment and I was absolutely crushed. But I think it made me long for her even more and when she came the next day. In the same way, **Christmas is all about that coming – finally being able to see and receive the person we’ve been waiting for so long**.

But of course, if we’re honest, for many of us, this is not the reason why we’re anticipating for Christmas. Jesus is only one of many things that describe Christmas to us. Our Christmas involves family, gift, the carols, snow, holidays, time to rest, time to be generous, and so on. And these are good things! I hope you get to be part of these things – but we must continue to remind ourselves that **they exist because Jesus came**. Jesus has to be at the center of all that we do. Unless we intentionally live in remembrance of this and continue to remind ourselves and our children, friends, families, and co-workers, **the true meaning of Christmas will be forgotten**. We will celebrate and wait in expectancy for the wrong reasons.

Christmas is about the coming of the Messiah. **Are you anticipating for Christmas for the right reason?** Just like I did all the things that would have made Alicia happy in anticipation of her coming, are you living your life longing for Jesus? If you are, that’s great! If you’re not, I do pray that today’s message will lead you to do just that.

Let’s turn to our passage for today which is found in Luke 1:5-25. I love this book because Luke is filled with stories of hope, faith, fear, doubt, and struggles – the real issues that all of us experience daily. And today is no different. You’ll begin to see that unfold in this story as well. What’s amazing is that in the midst of all these small stories, Luke is trying to tell us the grand story of God who has stepped into the world that He created, sustains, and loves to redeem it to Himself. And this is what you’ll continue to see for the next four weeks as we look at the birth story of Jesus told by Luke. It’s going to be a team preaching so you’ll get to hear from all the pastors. And it’s going to be evangelistic – so please invite your non-believing friends, family members, and neighbors and give them an opportunity to hear the gospel.

Let me read it for us:

<sup>5</sup> In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. <sup>6</sup> Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. <sup>7</sup> But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. <sup>14</sup> He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. <sup>16</sup> He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

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<sup>23</sup> When his time of service was completed, he returned home. <sup>24</sup> After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. <sup>25</sup> "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." **(Luke 1:5-25 NIV11-GK)**

We'll look at the life of Zechariah by breaking this story down to three themes and see how it speaks to all of us. But at the end, I want to bring it all together to show that this is actually leading us to see the greater story of God – to invite and draw us to anticipate and welcome our King during this season of Advent.

### **1) THE THEME OF WAITING (V. 5-7)**

The passage begins with a man named Zechariah. Since this is a narrative, we must understand and get to know our characters well. Luke tells us a number of things about him:

First of all, we know that **he was a priest**.

Secondly, we know that **he was married to Elizabeth**.

Thirdly, **both Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God**.

Fourthly, we learn that **they were childless**. And what made this story more heartbreaking was that **they were both very old**. They have been struggling with infertility for a long time. This is where we begin to see the theme of waiting unfold. No doubt they wanted to have children. We know this because we read later in the passage that the angel came to tell them that their prayer of life has been answered and that they will have a child. **Now, it's hard to feel the weight of this unless we begin to place ourselves into the story.** Maybe this story speaks volumes to some of you because you're struggling with infertility right now. You'll resonate with the weight of what Zechariah was going through, but those of you who can't relate, imagine with me. Imagine the frustration they must have felt (wanting desperately, trying, and waiting, but not being able to have a child) – the grief, depression, sorrow, despair, and maybe even anger. Maybe there was jealousy as they looked at other couples. Who knows? Maybe he was blaming himself – or blaming his wife – or blaming God. Can you imagine the countless prayers they offered up to God? They were waiting and waiting for God to answer but it seemed like God was silent. And it didn't help the fact that they were living in **a culture where infertility was considered a curse from God**. They might have been considered righteous in the sight of God but not in the sight of men. People were talking behind their back: "They must have done something wrong. There must be something wrong with them." It led them to disappointment, shame, and guilt. And slowly, **their hearts became hard and cold**. Doubt appeared. He began to think that God wasn't going to do anything about it and he will remain here forever. There was no more hope. "This is it. This is all there's to my life." **He began to accept this as the reality of his life.**

Can you feel the weight of his life? **Maybe Zechariah wasn't like this all the time.** Maybe he was living months, years, and decades of hope, prayer, confidence, and trust – not only believing that God would give them a child but that He would work powerfully in his life and the life of the Israelites. He had hope. He believed that God will bring freedom from the years and generations of domination under other nations. But in the midst of this what-seems-like an eternal and unfulfilling wait, Zechariah gave up.

**Does this describe you today?** I go to work. I do my chores. I pay the bills. I entertain myself with a few things. Go to sleep and do it all over again the next day. Maybe you're thinking that this is all there's to life. Just like Zechariah, we're thinking that God won't do anything "real" in our lives. We may believe that theologically God can break into our lives but many of us may start to doubt that God will actually do something today.

As Christians, we believe without a doubt that Jesus is the answer to our problems and the only satisfaction to our souls. **But is He really? Is Jesus really the answer to your problem today?** Your career problem, financial problem, marriage problem, friendship problem, emotional problem, spiritual problem, depression problem, and all the other problems. The world is telling us that we can fix this by reading this book, buying this car, clothes, or gadget, having this job, dating the right person, having a certain size of bank account, going on a vacation, getting drunk to escape the reality, finding the right hobby, and the list can be countless. **Brothers and sisters, in the midst of many voices in the world that offer solution, are we turning to the voice of Jesus who is the only and true solution?** Pastor Tim Keller calls these other voices **our functional gods**. Sure we believe in the God of creation. But we have functional gods that continue to be the solution to our imminent problems. **What is your functional god today?** Friends, one truth we must remember is that **these functional gods can never be the solution – they will always disappoint us**. Let me confirm this for you: He *is* the answer to our imminent and ultimate problem. Do you believe it?

God called Zechariah to wait. But he couldn't wait any longer and **this waiting led to the hardening of his heart**. This was absolutely detrimental because when the wait was finally over, Zechariah could not respond with joy.

## 2) THE THEME OF DOUBT (V. 8-22)

In verse 8, we see that Zechariah was chosen by lot to go into the Temple to burn incense for the people. Now, this is kind of special because there were 18,000 priests at that time and not everyone got to enter the Temple of the Lord. **But Zechariah goes into the Temple and does his thing with no expectation for God to show up until He actually does.** This might help us understand why he wasn't really expecting. We'll talk more about it later but God was silent for 400 years at this point in the history of the Israelites. 400 years of silence and his circumstances made Zechariah believe that God wasn't going to show up. That's why, in verse 11, Luke tells us that an angel appeared and Zechariah was startled and was gripped with fear. Zechariah was so shocked that an angel, which is an extension of God's presence, actually showed up, and the original language tells us that he literally fell over. But if you think more about it, **Zechariah is in the Temple where God dwells.** This is where He meets His people. He should've expected and longed for God to speak and show up but he didn't.

Maybe some of you here are no different from Zechariah. We come to this place with no expectation. Maybe some of us come because this is our routine. Maybe some of us have been forced to come. **We come to mindlessly sing, listen, give, sing some more songs, and go home. But brothers and sisters, He will show up.** Will you be ready? If this is true, why do we take our Sunday service so lightly? Why do we come late? Why do we tune out and disengage?

There is something else that leads us to conclude that Zechariah stopped expecting. Look at verse 13. The angel says, "*Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son.*" God was basically saying, "Zechariah, do you remember the prayer that you used to pray that you gave up on? Good news! You *will* have a baby! And this child is not going to be just a nobody; no, he's going to play a significant role in My salvation plan." **Can you imagine the joy it *should* have brought in Zechariah's heart?**

But, that's not what we see – **we encounter Zechariah's doubt right away.** Look at verse 18. "*How can I be sure of this?* Let me be honest with You, God. I thought that You were going to break into my life. I had hoped that You would actually do it. I waited and waited and waited. Others laughed at me; others doubted, but I continued to believe – but, look where I am today. I'm old. My wife is old. Are you kidding me? Logically, realistically, and physically, it's impossible for us to conceive! Can you even grasp the pain that we went through from waiting? Do you know how desperately we longed for a child? And we're finally coming to accept this reality but you come to say this is going to happen now? It's too late. I don't want to be disappointed again."

Look how the angel responds: "***I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God and I have been sent by God Himself. Isn't that good enough?***" And Zechariah basically said, "No, that's not good enough."

Now, if we're honest with ourselves, maybe we can relate to Zechariah here because this is how we would've responded too. "You're telling me that You love me? Are You kidding me? Are You seeing where I am today and You want me to believe that? Because the Bible says so? No, that's not good enough."

Listen to what Gabriel says, "Zechariah, because you doubted, you won't be able to speak until the day this happens. But know this, it will happen the way God intended. **Your faithlessness will not hinder the faithfulness of God** who fulfills His promises at their appointed time – in other words, **in His perfect time.**"

We may think that Gabriel might have been too harsh on Zechariah by making him a mute. But one thing we must remember is that **no matter what the situation may be, it doesn't give us the right to sin. Holiness cannot be compromised in any circumstances.** We cannot pick and choose when to be holy. We don't pursue holiness only when things are going well. **We pursue holiness all the time because this is what God desires in us, this is what He commands us to do, and this ultimately is what we're created to do.**

And let me make it clear: **doubting is sin**. I love how Pastor Tim Keller defines it. He says, “**Doubting is believing that God won’t get it right.**” Doubting is denying the sovereignty and faithfulness of our God. Just because it feels like God is silent in our life, we don’t have the right to think that God is not going to get things right. The truth is that He will. And **He will always do so in the most perfect timing**. He is never late. He never forgets. His timing is always perfect.

To reaffirm, God was not too harsh on Zechariah and God was not punishing Zechariah. **God was disciplining Zechariah because He loved him**. God disciplines at times not because He’s full of wrath, but because He’s full of love. I know it’s hard to understand this but we must realize that **the wrath of God is best seen when He does nothing about our sin**. In one sense, God is letting us fall into sure disappointment, grief, sorrow, and death because that is the consequence of our sins. In contrast, the love of God manifests itself when God shows up and says, “No more. I am not going to let you sin any longer. I’m going to discipline you. It’s going to be hard. It’s going to hurt but it will make you stronger.” Parenting helps us understand this thought better. No parent disciplines their child out of hatred but out of love.

**If this is true and we know that doubting is sin, then how do we overcome this doubt?** How do we continue to trust and believe that He is working for us even in this time of suffering, struggles, pain, and trials? It is to continue to confirm this truth in your heart, that **God loves you**. Brothers and sisters, God loves you and me unconditionally. His love covers all things. He is working unceasingly in your life whether you see it or not. Even when it seems like the whole world is against you, when it feels like nothing is going the way you wanted, God loves you – and He has carried you time after time.

Again, I know this is strange but God loves you enough to let you suffer right now. He loves you enough to disciple you so that **we may grow in our patience and become more mature and complete to become more like Him (James 1:2-4)**. God always has a purpose though it may be difficult for us to see it right now. But remember that He loved you enough to let the Son of God suffer and be killed on the cross on behalf of you. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 8:31:

*“What shall we say? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

What more can I say? We must not doubt. And the only cure to our doubt is to reaffirm and know that God loves us unconditionally. The evidence is at the cross.

### 3) THE THEME OF FULFILLMENT (V. 23-25)

Luke tells us that after his time of service was completed, he returned home. And after this, Elizabeth was pregnant. Honestly we don’t know how long it took from the moment of his return to her pregnancy. It could have been that day, a week, a month, or a year. We just don’t know how long it has been because Luke doesn’t tell us. **But what we do know is that it was fulfilled**. Elizabeth was pregnant. Now Elizabeth remained in seclusion for five months because she didn’t want others to misunderstand. Think about it. It’s really hard to tell if a woman is pregnant or not in the first five months. If Elizabeth went out to the people too early and told them that she was pregnant, then the people will think that she has finally gone crazy. She is making things up to feel good about herself. So she was wise in keeping this to herself until her belly started to grow. This is what she says in verse 25, “*The Lord has done this for me. He has shown His favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.*”

This is absolutely amazing because despite the doubt of Zechariah, God was faithful to them. Brothers and sisters, God is sovereign and His plans cannot be thwarted by our own plans or our own faithlessness. Pastor John MacArthur said this: **"Faithless people don't change the plan; they just forfeit the blessedness of participating in what God is about to do."** It will come. It will happen, just the way God said it will happen. Doubt will only eliminate us from seeing that promise come to its fruition.

## CHRISTMAS/ADVENT MESSAGE

So what does this mean for us today as we celebrate this season of Advent? The story of Zechariah will help us understand this better. Like I shared before, God was absolutely silent to the Israelites for 400 years. Since the completion of the last book in the OT (Malachi), God hasn't spoken to them audibly, through a prophet, or through an angel. He was absolutely silent and the Israelites were left waiting. Waiting for what? The book of Malachi ends by promising for the Messiah who will come to heal and redeem His people. And the Israelites were excited and hopeful. But no one knew that the promise would be fulfilled 400 years after. I have no doubt that many of the Israelites experienced what Zechariah and many of us went through. They too might have been in that darkness – which led to doubt.

What Luke wanted to do through the story of Zechariah is to call all of us to have **hope again**. The Messiah is coming. And nothing will stop that. It will be fulfilled. How would we do that? **The birth of John**. The Old Testament prophets prophesied that someone will come to prepare the way for the Messiah (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1). Listen to what Luke says in verse 17 describing John, Zechariah's baby: *"He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* This verse would have been a clear sign to the Israelites that the Messiah is coming. If this is true, then Luke is telling us that we have a choice – **to doubt or to hope again**. That's how the story of Zechariah should lead us to respond during Christmas – to hope again.

Brothers and sisters, this is the story of Christmas. God's promise is being fulfilled. The wait is finally over. God has entered into our world. **We get to meet the King of kings, Lord of lords, and the only One who is able to satisfy our empty souls and save us from sin which leads only to death.** His coming is absolutely significant for this reason: No matter how you think of yourself, we are all sinners before God. There is no exception. God cannot tolerate small or big sins because He is absolutely perfect. So in His holy presence, we all deserved His wrath and judgment. Now, in order to rescue us and make us His children, He didn't just forget our sins and pretend like it never happened. No, someone had to pay the penalty. So He sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ (Christmas), to pay the penalty of death (Easter). It should've been us but Jesus died on the cross, bearing all our sins. Why did He do this? To quote, Elizabeth again from verse 25, *"The Lord has done this for us. He has shown His favor and taken away our disgrace."* He has shown His favor. We don't deserve it. No one deserves it. But God did this because He loves us. **We celebrate Christmas for this reason – the Savior King has come.**

## APPLICATION

What does this mean for us? I want to speak to those who haven't yet given their lives to Jesus – those who aren't sure if it really is worth giving your life to Jesus. **I want to invite you to turn to Jesus right now.** He really is all that you need and He will satisfy your soul in a way that this world cannot. He will give you what you truly need (life) and He will make the purpose of your life clear. Have you given up trying to overcome your emptiness, insecurities, hopelessness, and brokenness of your heart? **Surrender your life to Him. Entrust yourself to Him.**

Christians, how should we respond? Three ways: Number one, **praise**. Remember that John is Zechariah's first baby. But after months of silence, the first word he speaks is not about his baby but it's about the Messiah. You know why? Because during that time of silence, he realized that the baby that he has been waiting and longing for is not the ultimate thing that he needs to fill this emptiness and hole in his heart. Zechariah realizes that John is actually here only to point to the One who all of us have been waiting for.

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This is how we should respond too. **As we enter into this season of Advent, let us praise God with all of our hearts, minds, and strengths for the coming of Jesus Christ.**

Secondly, **trust and wait**. You might be going through suffering right now. You're on the verge of giving up. Don't give up. Let us continue to pray, trust, and wait for His perfect timing to act. He will act – yes, sometimes it's not in a way that you wanted but He will. **And His way is always good.**

Lastly, **mission**. Think about John and his privilege of pointing the people to the long-awaited Messiah and Savior of the world. In contrast, Zechariah was taken away of that privilege when he became a mute. He probably wanted to tell others that he encountered God and that He finally understands but He couldn't. Brothers and sisters, we have the same privilege. We can share with the world that this Messiah has come. Don't miss that opportunity.

## **CONCLUSION**

We know that this miraculous story of Zechariah is not the end of the story. John's birth is just a beginning of another story which we get to hear next Sunday. **This Advent, let us remember that Christmas is all about Jesus – His arrival.** The wait is over – let us hope again.