

“The Silent Witness”

Luke 1:5-25

During this Advent Season, we are going to spend these three weeks focusing on the different periods of life and ministry of John the Baptist. He is the central figure of the Advent Season. John is the final Old Testament prophet. His words are so powerful that all of Jerusalem will go out to the banks of the Jordan to hear him. When I thought about putting this series together, I was going to begin with John bearing witness in silence by leaping for joy in his mother’s womb at hearing the voice of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

But tonight we go back even further. John is a silent witness in the womb, but he is not the only silent witness. Zechariah, his father, is unable to speak until the word of the Lord is fulfilled.

But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. We begin with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Luke says that they were righteous

before God and walked blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. This puts them in select company. In the Old Testament, only the likes of Abraham, Job, and David are described in those terms – righteous and blameless. Like Abraham, Job, and David, this did not mean that they were without sin – it means that their faith and trust were unwavering even though they were facing challenges in this life.

However, in the eyes of the world, Zechariah and Elizabeth lived under scrutiny and were considered anything but righteous and blameless. They had no children. Children are, of course, a blessing from God. Therefore, it was assumed by the ignorant masses that they had done something deserving God's curse. They were possessing or hiding some sin or guilt.

That is the way the world thinks. Luther calls it the Theology of Glory. It is proclaimed by many today that “if you have enough faith, or if you are right with God, the Lord is going to bless you with health, wealth, and happiness.” That is not the way God operates. Look at the other “righteous” and “blameless” people in Scripture.

Abraham, Job, and David all had crosses to bear. And it was their faith, not their works that made them righteous in the sight of God.

Zechariah is a priest. It is time for his division of priests to serve, and he has been afforded the privilege of burning incense in the Holy Place – inside the Temple. This may have been the only time in his life that he would do this. Although this duty was chosen by lot, don't misunderstand that this means these proceedings happened by random chance. God had a plan.

Zechariah would be a father. His prayer would be answered. And this would be no ordinary child. He would be the one of whom Isaiah foretold who would make ready and prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.

And Zechariah being “righteous” and “blameless” before the Lord reacts the way any of us would react. Remember that you too are righteous and blameless before the Lord, but it is because of faith, not works. Zechariah is no different. He has faults, failures, and doubts. He knows what people have been saying about him and his wife. He wants some reassurance, because no

one wants to look like a fool. He has to be thinking, “How can I tell anyone about this?”

So, God solves his problem and has the angel Gabriel silence him until John is born and John is named. The name John means, “the Lord has been gracious.” Although some questions will arise because that is not a traditional name in Zechariah’s family, it is the name God had chosen and it is very appropriate.

“The Lord has been gracious.” He was gracious to Zechariah and Elizabeth – answering their prayer, taking away their shame and reproach among the people, and even more, the Lord has been gracious in sending John the Baptist to prepare the world to receive the Savior.

As a child in the womb, like his father, John was silent this week. As we will see next Wednesday, during his ministry, no one could silence him. He is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord.’ Amen.