

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Martin R. Eden

Advent 1  
Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.  
December 2, 2020

# “The Silent Witness”

Luke 1:5-25; 1 Kings 19:9-18; Hebrews 1:1-14

During this Advent Season, we are going to spend these three weeks focusing on the different periods of the 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 trust and relationship with God was unwavering even though they were facing challenges in this life and even conducted themselves in such sinful ways that God chastised them and called them to account for their actions.

The very Word of God declares that Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous before God and walked blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 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 was a priest. It was 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. Yet, even as a child in the womb, John would make his joy known and would begin his lifelong proclamation of Jesus being the Lamb of God and Savior of the world. As we will see next Wednesday, during his ministry, no one could silence him. John is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord.’ Amen.