

# “How Shall I Know This?”

Genesis 17:15-21, Ephesians 2:1-10, Luke 1:1-25

During these three Wednesday Advent services, we are going to look at the days leading up to the birth of our Lord from the perspective of Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah. Zechariah and Mary each have questions concerning God’s message to them concerning the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus.

In our text today, when the angel tells Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth will at long last give birth to a son, in disbelief he asks the question, “How shall I know this?” Literally, “How can I be sure of this?”

This is the attitude we often have toward God still today. Like Zechariah, we often see God as being limited. We would never say that as a point of doctrine, but when we look at how we conduct our lives day to day, where we place our trust; do we really treat God as being God?

For example, this past week, multitude of people were willing and eager to get up before the crack of dawn and go shopping or hunting because they had a day off of work. There is nothing wrong with doing that. However, if, during the rest of the year, that same person determines that they can’t make it to church on Sunday mornings because that is their only day off of work, then there

is a problem. God is not being treated as God. Whatever your highest priority is, that is your God.

Our journey through this Advent Season is a progression from the disbelief and doubt of Zechariah, to the belief but bewilderment of Mary, and finally to the excited anticipation of the one coming who had found favor with the Lord. What we find is that we have a lot in common with the saints of old.

Today, our focus is on Zechariah and his disbelief. Prior to this day, I am sure that if anyone asked Zechariah if he thought that God can do anything that he would answer with a resounding “Yes!” – just like any of us would. Nothing is impossible for the Lord. Then an angel appears to him and tells him that he and Elizabeth were going to have a son. If he had been reading his Old Testament, Zechariah would have realized that just like Abraham and Sarah were blessed with the birth of Isaac in their old age, so too, he and Elizabeth were going to be blessed with the birth of John. Abraham and Sarah had their moments of doubt also. They were as faithful as anyone in history, but they each laughed at the words of the angel of the Lord.

Zechariah, rather than blessing and praising God for the good news that the angel Gabriel had brought to him, Zechariah asked, “How can I be sure of this?” He had heard this message that was just too good to be true. Before he could go “all in” on what he was told, he needed proof or at least a little more assurance than just words. We are so much like Zechariah. Publicly stating

within our insulated circle of family and friends that we believe in God; that is easy for us to do. Going “all in” and treating God as our highest priority – like He is our God; this is something we struggle doing because all that we have to work with is the promise of His Word.

We look around at our community, especially during the Advent and Christmas Seasons, and see that people are constantly being presented the Good News that Jesus Christ came into this world to redeem us from the guilt of our sin. But our human nature sees God as limited. “How can I be sure of this?” “How can I really know this?” “How do I know that God is really God?”

It seems too easy. All that I have to do is put my faith and trust in an Almighty God who is only revealed to me in the teachings of this book that was written a few thousand years ago, and who is said to bring forgiveness through His Word being joined to water, or bread, or wine?

Our world feels the same way that Zechariah felt. When presented with this greatest of Good News, that by the world’s standards is just too good to be true, the common reaction is to feel that there is no way that an Almighty God would take the time and be so concerned with me.

If God is really God, why would an Almighty go to such lengths to save me? Why would an Almighty God choose me to be one of His redeemed people? Why would God be so concerned that I am washed clean in the water of Baptism or nourished with the Body and Blood of His own Son?

Just like Zechariah was overwhelmed with the physically improbable prospect that he and Elizabeth would be blessed with a child in their old age, we too are often overwhelmed with the tremendous gifts and blessings that God has poured out upon each one of us. And we may ask the question, “How can I be sure of this?”

Don’t be overwhelmed by the unconditional love and mercy that God has shown to you. You will never figure it out or rationally reason it out. By the world’s standards, the gift of Jesus Christ seems too good to be true.

However, the world does not love unconditionally. The world does not show unconditional mercy, kindness, grace, or forgiveness. When we see that happening in our lives, that is God being God. And where it happens is right here. Those are the characteristics of God Himself. God is most correctly understood when He is seen as loving, merciful, kind, and just.

Even though Zechariah first reacted to the good news of the angel with disbelief, he was shown the love, mercy, and blessings of God. And through Zechariah’s son John, the world was introduced to the greatest blessing that God ever gave to His people – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

How can I be sure of this? We can only be sure when we look outside of ourselves and see the sure and certain promise of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting – a promise found only in His Word. Amen.