



Luke 1:5-23 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. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

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

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 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. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 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. 16 He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 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."

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 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. 20 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."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 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.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "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."

Icebreaker

Tell about something you are anticipating. What kind of waiter are you?

Conversation Starters

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth were good, faithful people but they could not have a child. Why do you think God allows this kind of pain in the lives of those who love him?
2. Do you think when Zechariah went into the temple to burn incense he expected to encounter God? Why or why not? Do you expect to encounter God in your life? Why or why not?
3. Its curious in this Advent story that when Mary questions how on earth she will become pregnant if she has not been with a man, the Angel of God simply explains how it will happen. But when Zechariah questions the angel about almost the same thing, he is struck dumb because of his doubt? Do you ever question God when very different kinds of things happen to equally good people?
4. Talk about the concept that God is both stranger and friend to us ... How do you see this concept played out in this story? How do you see this concept played out in your own life?
5. One of the things that God often mysteriously asks his followers to do is wait. This story is filled with people waiting on God to do things.
 - a. Have you ever had to wait on God?
 - b. Have you ever questioned God's timing?
 - c. Have you ever wondered about what on earth God is doing when he has his people wait?
 - d. What have been some of your answers?
6. At the end of her teaching Alice says, we don't know why God allows what he allows or goes silent for long periods of time. We don't know because God is a mystery, incomprehensible. How does that answer sit with you?