

**A Word Fitly Spoken   December, 2023**

*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 give him the name John”... Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.” Luke 1:13, 18*

Poor Zechariah! Every Christmas season his response to the angel Gabriel's wondrous announcement is told and retold, and the old priest is held up as an example of what happens when we don't believe what God tells us how he's going to answer our prayers. But perhaps you and I should be a bit more sympathetic toward Zechariah – after all, he didn't respond all that much differently than we do.

Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a long time for the blessing of a child, and preferably a son. To be childless in Judea at this time was widely believed to be a sign of divine displeasure, that God withheld the blessing of children due to some fault or sin hidden in the lives of the husband or wife. This was compounded by the fact of Zechariah being a priest – what if he were the one at fault? And so it would not be surprising that after years of praying, that their prayers might have become a matter of routine, of asking for something they had stopped believing it could ever happen. And now, at long last, comes the the long-awaited reply from God, and it's all they could have ever hoped for! Is it any wonder that the old priest might have wondered aloud how all this could happen? Is he not like us, in that great news sometimes leaves us flabbergasted and stunned?

Let's take heart from the example of Zechariah this Christmas season, for in the fullness of time he and Elizabeth did have a son, the man we call John the Baptist. Our Heavenly Father can use us for his glory, even if at first we can hardly take in what He promises to do. Better yet, He can do it at any age; we are *never* too old to play our part in God's purposes. So let's stay open to Him in our hearts and minds, and start thinking more about God's *ability* and less about our *inabilities*, and this Christmas just might bring about big surprises for all of us!

Sister Debbie and I want to wish each one a blessed Christmas, from our house to yours. And may 2024 be a season of joy, happiness, and good health for all!

Pastor Ed Robbins