

## Zechariah

My name is Zechariah and I am a priest by descent from Aaron. Today, I am filled with joy as I tell you of the LORD's wonderful dealings with me.

Because, you see, there was a time when I could not speak... for over 9 months... And during that time I did a lot of thinking about what I would say when the ability was given back to me.

I have been told that there are clans among your people where it is customary for the men to be silent for long periods of time.

But for me and my people it is seldom so.

Perhaps I should begin at the beginning.

Elizabeth and I had been married for many years and served the LORD faithfully. She also is a descendent of Aaron and devout in every way.

Yet, we had no children, although we prayed constantly.

This is a great disgrace according to the teachings handed down, for barrenness is a curse of God. My wife and I endured great shame as a result.

But I also made a study of the Law and discovered that although childlessness is in some cases a judgment, it is not always so.

Therefore, like Job, I endured the misunderstanding of those who knew less of the mysteries of the LORD.

One day, after the lot had fallen on me to enter the Temple to offer incense before the LORD, I went about my duty.

Have you ever found spiritual duties to be dull and boring? Of course, it should not be so, but it happens and it must have happened to me, for I forgot that I was entering the very presence of the One Whose Name we dare not speak.

As was my custom, I prayed not only for the people but also for my wife, not imagining that it would be answered after so many years.

So when an angel appeared and spoke to me I was surprised and terrified. Through my mind flashed all the stories of those who behaved wrongly, even out of ignorance, and were struck dead.

The angel was as brilliant as the sun and I simply knew by looking that he carried great power.

After telling me to not be afraid, he brought the most amazing message.

We were to have a child in our old age and he was to be our joy and delight.

My mind went to the ancient priest, Eli, whose sons brought him shame and sorrow and realized what a blessing had been promised.

But our son, the angel continued, would be much more than that, for he would be filled with the Spirit of the LORD and be a prophet of the Most High.

And now looking back, I see the wisdom there may be in silence, for at that moment I spoke my foolish thoughts.

Although I knew in my heart that the angel could have struck me dead or raised me up and that his appearance was most obviously evidence of the LORD's doing, I asked him for a sign.

He fittingly tied my tongue, until all things had been accomplished.

As I emerged from the Temple, the crowd had become alarmed at the long wait and knew when I could not speak that something extra-ordinary had happened.

I did a poor job of communicating by gestures and I am afraid that the stories which spread were mostly speculation.

When my wife told me some time later that she was indeed with child, I hoped for my speech to return, but it did not.

When Elizabeth's young cousin, Mary, came to visit, we began to understand that the unfolding story was even greater than we first knew.

Mary was also with child and He was to be the long awaited Messiah. Our son, John, would be His prophet.

As I pondered these things, I wondered at the mystery of our God.

Elizabeth was disgraced in the minds of the people because of her barrenness but now relieved of that shame by miraculously conceiving after many years of marriage.

Mary, only now promised in marriage and not yet having been with a man, had conceived by the Spirit of God.

And yet, as the tongues of the ignorant wagged, she was considered disgraced and sinful.

When Elizabeth gave birth, the word spread and congratulations came from everywhere.

I had long prepared the speech I would give when my voice returned, but it was not yet to be.

All the attention for those first few days went to my wife and the infant, which also taught me something I needed to understand.

But then came the day of circumcision.

They were going to name him after me and would not believe it when Elizabeth said he was to be called "John."

I laugh when I picture that moment for they began signing to me as I had tried to sign so many months before.

Of course, I could hear perfectly well and simply could not speak.

By then they had given up shouting at me for I would always cover my ears and turn away.

At least I had gotten wiser over that period of time.

I called for a tablet and wrote, "His name is John."

At that moment my voice returned and the LORD took the feeble words I had prepared and turned them into a hymn of joy and prophecy of power.

And the rest, as you now know, is history... indeed, the center and pinnacle of history, the story of salvation to all people from the God of mercy and justice.

Luke 1:5 - 80