



SoulShare

Saturday, November 18 2017, 9:00—10:30 am Breakfast & Discussion:

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 not to 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 -- from his mother's womb -- 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 from his appearance that the angel could have struck me dead or raised me up and that the event foretold would be sufficient 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

What are some of the ways God prepared Zechariah to be the father of John?

If people look down on us, even God's people, does that mean that we are in the wrong?

Have you ever gone through the motions of a spiritual duty without thinking about its significance?

If you have children, have you found yourself thinking of what they mean to you instead of what they mean to God?

What did Zechariah's loss of ability to speech do for him? For Elisabeth. For the people?

How did this prepare them for the news about Mary?

Imagine you were there to hear Zechariah say this:

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us — to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."