

IN EXCELSIS DEO

ADVENT 2024

Wednesday, December 11

Read: Luke 1:5-17

In this passage, the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah in the temple and tells Zechariah that he will be a father in his old age. Zechariah and Elizabeth were an elderly, devout Jewish couple. Zechariah was a well-educated priest, and Elizabeth was descended from Aaron. Zechariah and Elizabeth were models of righteousness before God, but they were also barren. At this time, barrenness was viewed as a rebuke from God. There are clear parallels here of Abraham and Sarah's story: another devoted, barren couple, who also heard the unbelievable news that they would have a child who would usher in a new promise from God. As an educated priest, Zechariah would have known the Old Testament passages about Abraham and Sarah. Zechariah also knew the passages from Isaiah that promised a Messiah. Imagine Zechariah hearing that his son would be John the Baptist, the one to prepare the way for Christ! Within the backdrop of Zechariah in the temple, burning incense to God as a holy tradition, the angel brings a promise that God is doing a new thing. A promise that is generations old will now be fulfilled, and this promise will change the future of humankind.

How can this passage prepare our hearts for Christmas as we welcome the Christ child? God is faithful yesterday and today in such profound ways that we can barely imagine. The angel tells Zechariah that God has heard his prayers. Zechariah and Elizabeth had most likely given up hope decades earlier that they would have a child, let alone a child who would lead people to the Messiah. But God makes a way where it seems impossible to us. God keeps creating and making new beginnings in our own lives and in our relationships. Let us come to the manger in stillness and in awe, thankful for the transformative, mysterious love of God that can still surprise and change us.

Stephanie Ezell