

How God Broke His 400-Year Prophetic Silence

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."
(Luke 1:8-17)

The old priest enters the temple, carrying his incense. Alone. In the next moment, God breaks his 400 years of silence when the angel Gabriel—a messenger from the LORD—appears to Zechariah right there in the temple. "Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him," the Bible tells us, which means we're lucky the old guy didn't die of a heart attack (Luke 1:12). The angel delivers the good news: Zechariah and Elizabeth are going to have a baby boy. His name is to be John ("God is gracious"), and he will have a special calling on his life: "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the

spirit and the power of Elijah . . . To make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:16–17).

This is an amazing day. Not only is Zechariah going to have a son, he is going to have a son who will fulfill Malachi's prophecy, one of the most significant prophecies in the history of the world. He will lead the prophetic welcoming committee for God's entrance into human history as the boy who is Lord. Zechariah's response? "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years" (Luke 1:18).

Let's review. This is mind-boggling, history altering, and soul encouraging. Zechariah has been praying for a child for decades. The presence of God is right there in the temple, a few yards away. An angel is speaking to him. What else does he need?

Angels are worshippers of God who are ministers and messengers on his behalf. There are only two angels named in the Bible: Gabriel and Michael. Their credentials are unparalleled—"I stand in the presence of God," Gabriel tells Zechariah (Luke 1:19). And yet the old man doubts the news, which means he gets to learn a lesson. Gabriel basically tells him to go home, be patient, and keep quiet. Zechariah has just had this incredible experience and he won't be able to tell anyone about it because God renders him mute until John's birth. Not long after Zechariah's service at the temple, Elizabeth conceived and enjoyed a few months of worship, reflection, and preparation (with a silent husband as a consequence for him and perhaps a nice break for her) as she praised the Lord for his incredible, unexpected gift.

Where have you grown weary in prayer? Can you think of examples from your own life when God granted a request after years of answering "later"? {eo}

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