

The announcement of the birth of John

1 ⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there lived a priest named Zechariah, belonging to the priestly clan of Abiah. Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, also belonged to a priestly family. ⁶Both of them were upright in the eyes of God and lived blamelessly in accordance with all the laws and commands of the Lord, ⁷but they had no child. Elizabeth could not have any and now they were both very old.

⁸Now, while Zechariah and those with him were fulfilling their office, ⁹it fell to him by lot, according to the custom of the priests, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰At the time of offering incense all the people were praying outside; ¹¹it was then that an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²On seeing the angel, Zechariah was deeply troubled and fear took hold of him.

¹³But the angel said to him:

—Don't be afraid, Zechariah, be assured that your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you shall name him John. ¹⁴He will bring joy and gladness to you and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵This son of yours will be great in the eyes of the Lord. Listen: he shall never drink wine or strong drink, but he will be filled with holy spirit even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶Through him many of the people of Israel will turn to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He himself will open the way to the Lord with the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah; he will reconcile fathers and children, and lead the disobedient to wisdom and righteousness, in order to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel:

—How can I believe this? I am an old man and my wife is elderly, too.

¹⁹The angel replied:

—I am Gabriel, who stands before God, and I am the one sent to speak to you and bring you this good news! My words will come true in their time. ²⁰But you would not believe and now you will be silent and unable to speak until this has happened.

²¹Meanwhile the people waited for Zechariah, and they were surprised that he delayed so long in the sanctuary. ²²When he finally appeared, he could not speak to them and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He remained dumb and made signs to them.

²³When his time of service was completed, Zechariah returned home ²⁴and some time later Elizabeth became pregnant. For five months she kept to herself, remaining at home, and thinking:

²⁵—What is the Lord doing for me! This is his time for mercy and for taking away my public disgrace.

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